HUMAN DEVELOPMENT Volume 31: Number One: Spring 2010



LIVING WITH STRESS

sychospiritual Stress Management

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Perspective on Stress Among Roman atholic Lay Ministers

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

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Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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Are You Stressed?

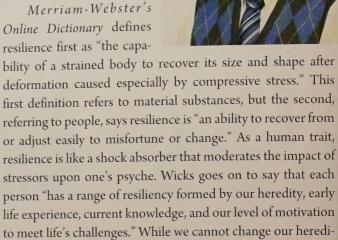
here is a curious poster about handling stress hanging in the copy-room where I work. It's from the company that provides employee assistance to our staff. It depicts two bare arms holding a makeshift flag aloft against a menacing sky. The pole is a tree branch and the flag itself is white and ragged. On it is written, "Don't Give in to Stress."

The words seem to conflict with the image. It looks very much like someone waving the white flag of surrender. But perhaps we are supposed to think of the heroic statue of the U.S. marines raising the flag of victory at Iwo Jima after one of the most difficult battles of World War II. Either way, the metaphor of a battle as a way to cope with the reality of stress seems unhelpful. Thinking of stress as a hostile force in our lives that we will either conquer or be defeated by is a recipe for failure. But this seems to be just the trap that we most often fall into, as if stress could be beaten in some psychic arm-wrestling match. Such victories are fleeting. That's because stress is not a quasi-personal adversary, but rather the result of the way we interact with the many and complex circumstances of our lives.

In this issue we will explore the reality of stress and in particular the various ways that people experience it in the church today—as priests, religious, lay ministers and family members. We will be looking at what psychologists call "chronic stress" as opposed to "acute stress." Chronic stress is the ordinary experience of struggling to balance the needs and demands of others with our own. It has physical, psychological, and spiritual consequences. Left unattended for a sufficient period of time, it can result in burnout. Acute stress is a more intense reaction to something that is perceived as an immediate crisis or danger.

Carroll Juliano and Loughlan Sofield remind us of another important distinction, between stressors and stress. Stressors are the factors in our lives that have the potential to produce stress. Work, family, friends, health and many other situations can be stressors. Often we must confront many stressors at the same time. But stress is not inevitable. Each person has a certain capacity to deal with stressors, a capacity which psychologists today call "resilience." In a recent interview in National Catholic Reporter, psychologist Robert Wicks defined resilience as "the ability to meet, learn from, and not be crushed by the challenges and stresses of life" (Dec. 11, 2009).

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary defines resilience first as "the capa-



Handling stress by becoming more resilient is a process, and it has both psychological and spiritual dimensions. We must begin by learning to recognize the symptoms of stress in our lives, both physical and psychological. Robert Wicks's book Bounce: Living the Resilient Life (Oxford University Press, 2010) is an excellent place to begin. Along with learning the symptoms of stress we can begin to learn some basic practices to control it. But beyond the techniques that psychology can teach us, there are spiritual practices available to us.

ty or past experience, we can increase our motivation and learn

more. In other words, we can become more resilient and learn

to adapt and adjust to the stressors in our lives.

Among those practices that emerge clearly from the articles in this issue, the one that stands above all is prayer. But prayer is not a single practice; it has many forms. Just as stress affects each person differently, so too the ways that prayer can help us avoid stress or cope with it are varied. So in this issue you will find descriptions of prayer as a process of growing in self-awareness, letting go, becoming more grateful, keeping one's perspective and rejoicing in creation. You may well have your own particular experience of prayer to add to these.

While our varied vocations and ministries are no doubt a source of purpose and joy in our lives, they naturally produce stressors as well. Our hope is that the reflections of our many contributors to this issue will offer you perspective on your own experience and help you not to defeat stress in battle, but to become more resilient in your response to the stressors in your life.

Robert m. Hamma

Letter to the Editor

found your Editor's Page comments on intimacy (Fall 2009) quite stimulating, specifically your observation that intimacy is comprised of an element of knowing and being known, and also an element of recognizing the limits of knowledge. It seems to me that this limitation of our knowing is not a drawback but a very positive thing. Let ne use "I and you" language to say what I mean. I cannot know you to the depths of your being partly because of my human inability to see the whole picture, but also, and more importantly, because you are a mystery. And that mystery at the core of you, that secret nexus or knot that is between you and God, must ever remain a mystery to me, sanctum sanctorum to which I cannot be admitted.

Because you are a mystery, my love for you is also an act of faith and of hope. Since you have revealed so much of ourself to me (both consciously and unconsciously), I see that you are lovable in your strengths and weaknesses, and am drawn to know you more deeply because I believe and I hope that there are even more wonderful and endearing iscoveries hidden within you. I hope that I will never reach the end of them (though I respect that utterly private anctum at the depths of your being).

I have long felt that to be an authentic, fully real person, there needs to be a secret somewhere at the heart of me. do not mean a secret that belongs to me alone—such secrets often corrode our hearts and poison our souls—but a ecret known only to me and God (and often not very clearly known even to me). And if God and I are destined to lelight in a relationship after this life, then I could say that my eternity will be in some way an ever-deepening revelation or unveiling of this mystery to me, until "I shall know even as I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

And what of God looking at me? Will he find me mysterious, surprising, unpredictable, revealing ever deeper ayers of candor, whimsy, delight, fervor? Who knows? How could that be? It seems to me, though, that once we do each a fullness of mutual love, God and I, there would result a sort of blissful union, an ecstasy of self-forgetfulness, hat could be described equally well as "unknowing."

And what of my knowledge there of others? I believe that others, though infinitely lovable and profoundly knowble, retain even "in heaven" that utterly secret, private bond with God alone, symbolized by the "new name" "known rely to the one who receives it" (Revelation 2:17). That is what makes heaven personal rather than oceanic.

The word *intimate* is derived from the Latin, to make known, but ultimately from *intimus*, meaning innermost. He who reveals himself as "I Am" awakens and calls forth that conviction of self in us, and then, by his own lovableness, alls us as persons into the deepest intimacy with, each other, yes, but ultimately, with himself.

Brother Ben Harrison, M.C.



Sychospiritual 5 1725 Management Thomas C. Barrett, Ph.D.

Thomas C. Barrett, Ph.D.

n any given day in the waiting room of any physician, psychotherapist, pastoral counselor or member of the clergy, it's a safe bet that much of the evident physical and psychological suffering will be at least exacerbated, if not directly caused, by stress. Our ongoing sense of feeling out of control as we experience sudden job terminations, chronic financial distress, painful family conflicts and significant health setbacks pervades our lives, eventually draining our resources and affecting our physical and emotional health. As the problems mount and the pressure escalates, stressed people can wind up in a straightjacket of panic, depression and despair, feeling helpless about improving the present and hopeless about the future. In living with the feeling that the bottom is falling out, biopsychosocial-spiritual factors can create a well-orchestrated cascade of stress-related symptoms which threaten to impair health, cause divorce, end careers and turn everyday life into a nightmare of dread and resentment.

In this article, I want to examine stress and some strategies for effectively reducing it from a slightly different perspective. First, I want to review the physical and psychological symptoms generally associated with stress. Then, I want to discuss the unique challenges facing psychotherapists and ministers, and how stress can affect them

specifically. Next, I want to move beyond the more familiar cognitive-behavioral stress management strategies and focus instead on psychospiritual resources as reflected in resilience, hardiness and sense of meaning. Specifically, I want to discuss how resilience can buffer stress, and how we can learn to be more hardy and resilient as we face the inevitable disruptions of life. Finally, I want to briefly discuss how psychotherapists and ministers can develop their psychospiritual resources and become more resilient in their work.

STRESS IN AMERICA

From a biological point of view, stress refers to a complex pattern of neurological and hormonal responses elicited by a perceived threat or stressor. Evolution graced us with a superb "fight or flight" response that has enabled us to escape from some creatures and kill others. But the longer the perceived threat exists, the longer our physiological stress responses are cued and this can lead to significant health problems. What do these stress-related reactions look like? We can certainly learn a few things about how stress looks by listening to people describe their stress symptoms and how they try to cope with them. In 2008, the American Psychological Association (APA) unveiled its "Stress in America 2008" survey and we learned that about 30% of surveyed Americans noted their average stress levels were extreme (i.e. ratings of 8, 9, or 10 on a 10 point scale where 10 meant a great deal of stress). At the same time, about 60% of survey participants reported feelings of irritability or anger, about 53% reported fatigue, and about 52% reported lying awake at night as a result of stress. Clearly, stress can look like anger, exhaustion and preoccupation.

The "Stress in America 2008" participants also reported other physical symptoms of stress including headache (47%), upset stomach (35%), muscular tension (34%), change in sex drive

(19%), teeth grinding (17%) and tightness in chest (16%). At the same time, they also reported certain psychological symptoms of stress such as: lack of interest or motivation (49%), feeling nervous or anxious (49%), feeling depressed or sad (48%) and feeling as though you could cry (40%). Obviously, stress can appear quite painful, both physically and emotionally.

As we could probably guess from the fact that the survey occurred during a year marked by extreme economic uncertainty, about 8 out of 10 survey participants indicated that money and the economy were important stressors. Similarly, they reported using a variety of rather familiar stress management



techniques including: listening to music (52%), exercising or walking (47%) and reading (44%). At the same time, about 37% reported praying to manage stress, while 21% reported going to church or religious services. Finally, 18% reported drinking alcohol, 16% reported smoking, 8% reported using meditation or yoga, and 7% reported seeing a mental health professional to manage stress.

A very intriguing finding emerged when the "Stress in America 2008" participants who used a given stress management technique were asked to rate whether it was effective in reducing their stress. As it turned out, praying and going to church or religious services were perceived by their adherents as the two most effective stress management

strategies. About 77% of those who prayed rated it effective in reducing their stress. Similarly, about 75% of those who said they went to church or religious services rated doing so as effective in reducing their stress. Compare these percentages with the fact that 65% of those who exercised or walked rated it effective and 61% of those who saw a mental health professional rated it effective. Finally, about 48% of survey participants indicated they would be somewhat or very uncomfortable asking others for help managing their stress, and about 58% indicated they would be uncomfortable seeking professional advice to help manage stress or stress-related problems. Apparently, some Americans may feel ashamed of their stress reactions and may choose to isolate, possibly making matters worse.

STRESS IN HEALERS

The "Stress in America 2008" survey indicated that the main causes of stress at work were low salaries (49%), heavy workloads (43%), lack of opportunity for growth and advancement (43%), unrealistic job expectations (40%) and job insecurity (34%). My guess is that most readers will be able to identify with at least some of these stressors. Undoubtedly, those of us in psychotherapy or ministry experience stressors and stress-related symptom patterns similar to the "Stress in America 2008" participants. At the same time, we may in addition sometimes experience stress reactions more unique to counselors in general.

After years of long days spent interacting with emotionally dependent or argumentative clients or congregants, we can sometimes find ourselves sliding into a state of emotional exhaustion called "burnout." This is a dangerous reaction marked by irritability, fatigue, negative countertransference reactions toward our clients or congregants and a lack of interest or involvement in our

professional activities. In burnout, we requently feel that our clients or congregants are literally pulling at us. As defense, we may develop a sarcastic or cynical attitude as reflected in a process of depersonalization ("My drug addict it 2 p.m."). We lose patience, warmth and perspective as we come to see our clients as undeserving and ourselves as ininspired. The danger here is, of course, that burnout leaves us rulnerable to all the unethical behavior and lapses in judgment that characterize he worst in our professions. Instead of being healers, we victimize the very people we were trained to serve.

At the same time, healers inevitably work with survivors of horrendous rauma: gruesome accidents, vicious crimes and terrifying disasters. We listen outinely to heartbreaking stories about he deaths of children, unwanted divorces and catastrophic illnesses. I once heard it said that a psychotherapist's office is like a toxic waste dump. The cumulative effect of this secondary rauma can be a gradual breakdown in he healer's coping resources and the development of some symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD) such as nightmares or difficulty concentrating. As a young psychologist, once worked at a maximum security county prison. I listened for years to ragic stories of human callousness as I vatched young people initiate lifetimes of intermittent incarceration. The prison had been built in the 19th century and had heavy metal gates which were slammed shut to make sure hey locked. When I began to hear those rates in the middle of the night, I knew it vas time for me to seek parole. Sometimes just being that close to trauna is traumatizing in itself.

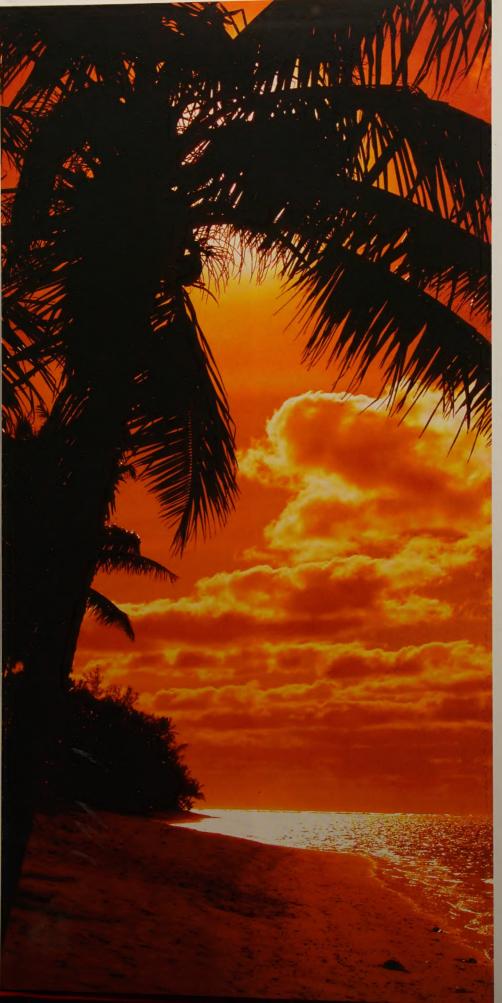
RESILIENCE

Since the 1980s, the psychological reatment of stress-related symptoms as been largely based on a familiar ange of cognitive-behavioral strategies.

Certainly, we are now well aware of the importance of breathing and relaxation exercises, meditation, biofeedback, avoiding catastrophic and pessimistic thinking, regular exercise, getting enough sleep, staying away from excessive alcohol and caffeine, taking regular vacations, etc. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention publishes a "Coping With Stress" sheet on its website. The sheet lists such stress management tips as: stay in touch with family (stay around people who are caring and positive), stay active (go for a walk or run), get involved (get involved in activities to support your community), avoid drugs and alcohol, find support (ask for help from a parent, friend, counselor, doctor, or pastor), take care of yourself (get plenty of rest and exercise and eat properly) and take a time-out (if you feel stressed, give yourself a break). Generally, these basic techniques seem quite effective. I teach breathing, stress the importance of exercise and recommend social support because my patients tell me they feel better. What works, works. At the same time, theory and research since the 1990s have begun to focus on another side to the stress management picture, a side that perhaps reflects a spiritual understanding of humanity and what Frankl long ago called self-transcendence. Let's take a look at what is going on.

Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, national concern was focused on the need to be strong in the face of adversity. The APA developed "The Road to Resilience" campaign to help people learn how to bounce back from very difficult situations. In an important article outlining the pathways to resilience, Bonanno (2004) noted that resilience is actually quite common, citing one research group's observation that, while about 50-60% of the U.S. population is exposed to traumatic stress, only 5%-10% develop PTSD. He described four factors that promote resilience. First, he related that the

I once heard it said that a psychotherapist's office is like a toxic waste dump. The cumulative effect of this secondary trauma can be a gradual breakdown in the healer's coping resources.



personality trait of hardiness can be a buffer to extreme stress. Hardiness was said to consist of three dimensions: "Being committed to finding meaningful purpose in life, the belief that one can influence one's surroundings and the outcome of events, and the belief that one can learn and grow from both positive and negative life experiences" (p. 25). He added that, having these beliefs, hardy people perceive difficult situations as being less threatening and are therefore less stressed. Moreover, hardy people were said to be more confident and more capable of using active coping and social support processes, thereby reducing the effect of whatever stress they did encounter.

The second pathway to resilience was self-enhancement or an overly positive bias in favor of the self. During periods of extreme stress, when threats to the self are paramount, these narcissistic souls seem to do better.

The third pathway was something called repressive coping. People who repress seem to avoid unwanted thoughts and feelings, using a process of emotional dissociation to distance themselves. For example, Bonanno cited a study of young women with histories of childhood sexual abuse. The repressors seemed less likely to disclose their abuse, but they also appeared to be better adjusted than the other survivors.

Lastly, Bonanno pointed out the pathway of positive emotion and laughter, noting research suggesting that positive emotions can facilitate a reduction in stress both by quieting or undoing negative emotion and by increasing social contact and support. For example, he cited a study indicating that the associations between measures of resilience and adjustment following the September 11 attacks were mediated by the experience of such positive emotions as gratitude, interest and love.

The concept of hardiness, cited by Bonanno (2004) as a pathway to resilience, has been studied extensively by another psychologist, Salvatore Maddi, founder and director of The Hardiness Institute. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, Maddi and his colleagues conducted a longitudinal study of hundreds of Illinois Bell Telephone managers who were faced with the stress of the deregulation of their industry. Psychological and medical tests were performed on the managers for about six years before and six years after the breakup of their company. Interestingly, while some two-thirds of the sample experienced anxiety, depression, alcoholism, heart attacks and divorce, about a third seemed to do quite well, apparently thriving under the stress. What the researchers discovered was that this stalwart bunch were exemplifying the three C's of hardiness described by Bonanno above: commitment, control and challenge. The subjects were committed to what they were about. They saw their difficulties as a challenge. Finally, they perceived themselves as being able to exert control over their outcomes. More recently, Maddi has described the hardy attitudes of commitment, control, and challenge as forming the courage required to grow resiliently. He has added that hardiness also involves skills in coping, social interaction and self-care which build on the courageous attitudes.

MEANING IN STRESS

The hardiness literature contains several studies of military personnel that seem especially riveting, given the severity of the stressors involved and the length of time these stressors may impact participants. In one such study, Britt, Adler and Bartone (2001) noted that hardiness has been defined as a tendency to find meaning in stressful events. They decided to investigate the

impact of the meaning individuals ascribed to their stressful work on whether they felt they derived benefits from the stressful situation when it was over. The hypothesis was that personality hardiness would associated with a tendency to find meaning in stressful work, and that finding meaning would be associated with later feeling the stressor had been beneficial. The group they studied included U.S. soldiers on peacekeeping duty in the former Yugoslavia. These troops, who were coping with boredom, family separation and uncertainty over when the mission would end, were midway through 12-month deployment and then four to five months postdeployment.

In order to assess meaning, Britt, et al. (2001) measured the soldiers' perceptions of the importance of their job, the degree to which they were engaged in their job and whether they had taken on a "peacekeeper identity" (i.e. the belief that peacekeeping roles were relevant to a soldier's identity). The results indicated that the soldiers evidenced a strong association between personality hardiness and the tendency to perceive meaning in their work as peacekeepers. In addition, there was a strong correlation between the meaning of work variable and the benefits they perceived from their deployment when it was over. The authors noted that their results made a contribution to the growing body of research on the role of meaning in the stress and coping process. They related that soldiers who were exposed to the damage caused by the war, instead of becoming depressed, seemed to be able to put their stress in a larger context and to see a reason for their sacrifice. This may have created a more meaningful atmosphere within which to work and it may have enabled them to later perceive benefits in their experience after their deployments were over.

While the ability to discover meaning in adverse circumstances does

indeed appear critical for the hardiness development of resilience, there is another hardy attitude we have yet to address: control. Both Maddi and Bonanno focused on the importance of our beliefs in our ability to influence the outcomes of difficult situations. Armed with these beliefs, we tend to keep trying and don't allow ourselves to feel powerless. That is, I am hardy (and hence resilient) not just because I perceive the importance (i.e. the meaning) of what I'm doing, but also because I am very confident I can actually do it. I have self-confidence or what Albert Bandura, a psychologist who has studied this phenomenon for decades, has called self-efficacy. He stated that the behavior of people, their emotional states and their degree of persistence is a function more of what they believe than what is factually true. In this sense, he related that we guide our behavior by our beliefs about what we can do, and that our beliefs about our capability affect our resilience to

Let me tell you my favorite self-efficacy story. In 1954, nobody thought anyone could run a mile in under four minutes. The existing mile record had stood for years. But in 1954, a 25-year-old British medical student set out to run the first sub-four-minute mile in human history. By visualizing himself running the race in a particular way, Roger Bannister crossed the finish line in 3:59.4. More importantly, after he did it, more than 50 other runners beat the four-minute mark over the next year and a half. Eventually, high school students were running sub-four miles. How was it possible for these other runners to do what no one thought possible in 1954? After Bannister did it, they knew it could be done. A key component of hardiness, our sense of control, is based on what we believe to be true. To be hardy and resilient, we not only have to have a sense of purpose, we have to believe we can accomplish that purpose.

For those with a spiritual identity, spirituality becomes

part of the coping

process.

PSYCHOSPIRITUAL COPING

The upshot of the resilience and hardiness literature is that it emphasizes the importance of perception and beliefs, along with social support and solid problem-solving skills, in effective coping. Stress management is more than just relaxation, getting enough exercise and cutting back on caffeine. Coping with stress involves crystallizing our view of who we are and why we're doing whatever we do. As Pargament (1997) noted: "We do not live totally at the mercy of stressful life events. In the face of crisis, we are guided and grounded by an orienting system" (p. 99). Our orienting system is our unique perception of ourselves, our world and how we should live in it. It is this perception that becomes the basis for the meaning we ascribe to our stress, and it is within the context of this meaning that we implement our hardy and resilient coping strategies.

For those whose world views encompass a relationship with the transcendent, there is another perspective, one reflected in Pargament's (2007) point in quoting Kushner, that God is found in human resiliency (p. 43). As spiritual beings, the act of finding meaning in adversity, of facing difficulties with courage, becomes, as Pargament notes, a spiritual endeavor. For those with a spiritual identity, spirituality becomes part of the coping process. They may seek to discern the spiritual meaning in a painful mess, making their suffering an opportunity for growth. For them, stress is not accidental; it has spiritual meaning and is potentially transformative. At the same time, they may pray for guidance and strength, allying themselves with the sacred and becoming more empowered and confident as a result. I must endure this unwanted divorce with faith and hope because, as William James (1902/2004) once said: "We and God have business with each other; and in opening ourselves to his influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled" (p. 442). The question is, does psychospiritual coping work?

Ray (2004) cited a study indicating that 25% of men over 55 years of age with no social support and also no comfort from religious beliefs died in the six months following heart surgery, as opposed to 4% of those who reported both social participation and strength from religious beliefs. The importance of spirituality in coping was further highlighted by Powell, Shahabi and Thoresen (2003) in considering the hypothesis church/service attendance protected against death. They reviewed studies which indicated an approximately 25% reduction in mortality associated with church/service attendance adjustment for established risk factors such as healthy lifestyle, social support and depression. These studies bring to mind Viktor Frankl's observation that survival in the concentration camps was based on finding meaning in the suffering. He noted pointedly that, when a prisoner lost faith in his future, he seemed to lose his spiritual grip and to sink into a psychological and physicals



state of decompensation. Most importantly, however, he noted that "Among those who actually went through the experience of Auschwitz, the number of those whose religious life was deepened-in spite of, not because of, this experience-by far exceeds the number of those who gave up their belief" (Frankl, 2000, p. 19). Having a spiritual perspective, having a purpose in life that connects us to the transcendent and to our loved ones, seems to strengthen our ability to be resilient in the face of adversity and to pick ourselves up with an optimistic face toward the better times ahead. This is the soul of psychospiritual coping, and the evidence indicates it does indeed work.

PREVENTING BURNOUT

Now we have to get practical. It's time to suggest elements of a treatment plan for preventing psychotherapist/minister burnout. What does psychospiritual coping have to offer? The short answer is: a lot, if we're willing to do the work.

As part of its "The Road to Resilience" campaign, the APA has developed a tip sheet entitled "10 Ways to Build Resilience" (see page 13). These tips include valuable coping strategies such as making connections with others, avoiding seeing crises as insurmountable problems, accepting that change is a part of living, moving toward your goals, taking decisive actions, looking for opportunities for self-discovery, nurturing a positive view of yourself, keeping things in perspective, maintaining a hopeful outlook and taking care of yourself. Self-care includes such sound advice as paying attention to your needs and feelings, doing things you enjoy and find relaxing and exercising regularly. Certainly, these cognitivebehavioral strategies would be important in preventing healer burnout. But there is another tool we can use, a tool that plays to our strengths as spiritual beings: the development of gratitude through prayer.

Lambert, Fincham, Braithwaite, Graham and Beach (2009) reviewed the positive effects of gratitude on such variables as one's perception of life as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful; lower depression and stronger social connections. At the same time, they cited a study which suggested that individuals who kept gratitude journals noted higher levels of optimism and seemed to feel better about their lives generally. In addition, they noted that some studies have suggested a relationship between gratitude and religiosity. Finally, they described a series of studies which seemed to indicate that praying increased gratitude. They suggested that self-perception theory may help explain their results. That is, participants may have expressed gratitude as part of daily prayer and later felt grateful because they observed their own expressions of gratitude. In addition, participants, in praying, may have reflected more about what they were grateful for; or prayer helped them to see familiar things, like life in general, as gifts. The authors noted: "We suggest that prayer is a formalized way to detach the self from usual stream of consciousness and to make the self aware . . . of certain blessings that are valuable and meaningful to the self" (p. 147).

As I noted earlier, burnout involves feeling resentful, exhausted and discouraged-not grateful. If we follow Bonanno's fourth pathway to resilience, if we are grateful, that means we accept our limitations as healers and those of our clients and congregants as human beings. We accept that we aren't perfect and we can't make people happy. We accept that change and growth are a slow, often difficult process. But we are thankful we have the opportunity to share the pain and touch the hearts-of those who come to us. In the end, perhaps we are most grateful for having spiritually engrossing professions within which to fulfill our destinies.

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StressTipSheet

In today's fast-paced and ever-connected world, stress has become a fact of life. Stress can cause people to feel overwhelmed or pushed to the limit. The American Psychological Association's 2007 "Stress in America" poll found that one-third of people in the U.S. report experiencing extreme levels of stress. In addition, nearly one-in-five report that they are experiencing high levels of stress 15 or more days per month. While low to moderate levels of stress can be good for you when managed in healthy ways, extreme stress takes both an emotional and physical toll on the individual.

With the consequences of poorly managed stress ranging from fatigue to heart disease and obesity, it is important to know how to recognize high stress levels and take action to handle it in healthy ways. Being able to control stress is a learned behavior, and stress can be effectively managed by taking small steps toward changing unhealthy behaviors. The American Psychological Association offers the following tips on how to manage your stress:

Understand how you experience stress.

Everyone experiences stress differently. How do you know when you are stressed? How are your thoughts or behaviors different from times when you do not feel stressed?

Identify your sources of stress.

What events or situations trigger stressful feelings? Are they related to your children, family, health, financial decisions, work, relationships or something else?

Learn your own stress signals.

People experience stress in different ways. You may have a hard time concentrating or making decisions, feel angry, irritable or out of control, or experience headaches, muscle tension or a lack of energy. Gauge your stress signals.

Recognize how you deal with stress.

Determine if you are using unhealthy behaviors (such as smoking, drinking alcohol and over/under eating) to cope. Is this a routine behavior, or is it specific to certain events or situations? Do you make unhealthy choices as a result of feeling rushed and overwhelmed?



Find healthy ways to manage stress.

Consider healthy, stress-reducing activities such as meditation, exercising or talking things out with friends or family. Keep in mind that unhealthy behaviors develop over time and can be difficult to change. Don't take on too much at once. Focus on changing only one behavior at a time.

Take care of yourself.

Eat right, get enough sleep, drink plenty of water and engage in regular physical activity. Ensure you have a healthy mind and body through activities like yoga, taking a short walk, going to the gym or playing sports that will enhance both your physical and mental health. Take regular vacations or other breaks from work. No matter how hectic life gets, make time for yourself—even if it's just simple things like reading a good book or listening to your favorite music.

Reach out for support.

Accepting help from supportive friends and family can improve your ability to manage stress. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist, who can help you better manage stress and change unhealthy behaviors.

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10Ways coBuildResilience

Moke connections

Good relationships with close family members, friends, or others are important. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organizations, or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.

2. Avoid theing orless so incommendable problems

You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

Accept that change is a part of living.

Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

Move cowers your year

Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly—even if it seems like a small accomplishment—that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

Minusipolativo nortani

Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

S. Local Time decomposition for the

People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality, and heightened appreciation for life.

a Normania publisher seek of yourself

Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

8. Newp Shings in governous conve-

Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

Матрат с вороби! оцьюок.

An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

IN Takes cares of your riff

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Additional ways of strengthening resilience may be helpful. For example, some people write about their deepest thoughts and feelings related to trauma or other stressful events in their life. Meditation and spiritual practices help some people build connections and restore hope.

The key is to identify ways that are likely to work well for you as part of your own personal strategy for fostering resilience.

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y 401(K) lost 50% of its value! My work hours have been cut in half! I've been laid off! The value of my home has declined sharply! I wanted to retire but now I can't afford to do it! I can't pay my utility bills this month! I've lost my health insurance! My car has been repossessed! My home is in foreclosure! I've got to file for bankruptcy!

Since at least the autumn of 2008 economic issues have compounded the ordinary stress of living. In response to the wave of anxiety sweeping through the country, a number of news reports indicated many people, particularly women, developed stress-related physical symptoms such as fatigue, muscle tension, headaches, and gastrointestinal upset. Some people, fearing they cannot afford to live too long on what remains of their retirement savings, opted not to consult a physician or neglect even routine health care.

An article in U.S. News and World Report (Kimberly Palmer, 2/10/09) cited research conducted by the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania that shows measures of happiness go up and down with business cycles. As a result of experiencing the deepest recession in decades, many persons reported increases in depressive symptoms and mood disorders and a substantial number of persons attempted to relieve their subjective sense of depression by turning to addictive behaviors—abusing alcohol or drugs or turning to gambling in hope of resolving their financial woes. Others responded to the financial crisis with irritability, anger and, in some instances, marital conflict and a sense of alienation.

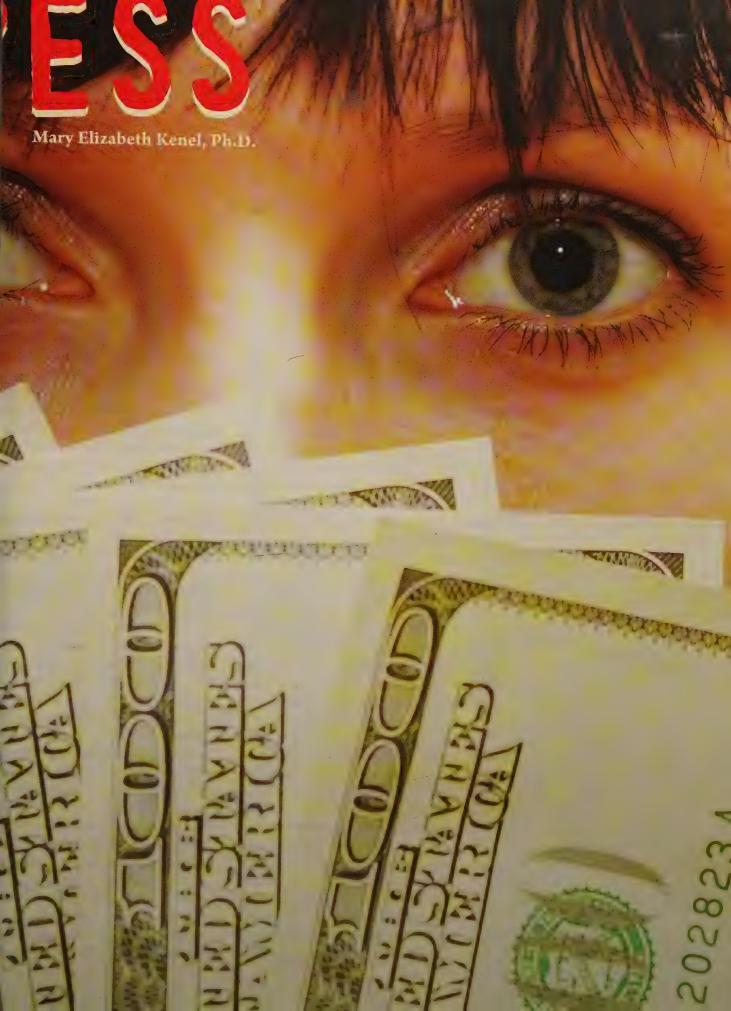
What sorts of coping mechanisms or strategies can be helpful in weathering the storm of economic crisis?

INVEST IN OURSELVES

When experiencing stress of any sort, including that imposed on us by the financial turmoil felt throughout the world markets, there is a tendency on the part of many of us to pay little attention to or even to totally ignore our bodily needs. Many of us succumb to the notion that worrying is more important than caring for ourselves. Yet, it is essential that we think first to take care of our bodies if we are to find the strength and energy to cope adequately with stress, especially this form of stress that many of us thought of as existing only in the memories of our parents or grandparents, something they referred to as "the Great Depression."

Although it may sound simple, maintaining a sound diet, regular activity and adequate sleep is vitally important in helping us maintain a stable and at least moderately happy mood. While budgetary constraints may impinge on us and limit our ability to buy organic foods, it is still necessary that we make the effort to eat well, attempting, for example, to avoid the foods that are most laden with pesticides or those foods that are likely to contain excess salt or a preponderance of calories from unhealthy fats. Fasting from unpleasant news, such as avoiding excessive scrutiny of stock losses or other material related to financial issues may assist in our avoiding emotional eating when faced with anxiety that is beyond our ability to





Engaging in the practice known as mindful eating, i.e., paying attention to eating, has the potential to help us consume less while still feeling content and satisfied, thus enriching our experience of nourishing ourselves. Getting more satisfaction from our regular meals tends to lessen the chances of our enduring food cravings at other points during the day. Enhancing the presentation of the food available, by serving food that has a variety of textures, colors, and aromas, also adds to our sense of being adequately nourished in body and in spirit. We might also wish to link physical self-nourishment with spiritual nourishment. The Scriptures are replete with references to food and meals. The Book of Proverbs (9:5), for example, presents us with the image of Lady Wisdom who calls us saying, "Come and eat my bread, drink the wine I have prepared!" The Gospel of John (6:51) depicts Jesus as the "living bread which has come down from heaven" and reminds us of his promise, "Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world." Eating in this manner encourages us to experience gratitude toward God, our Creator and Sustainer, for the gifts of food and drink and to praise God our Savior who has called us to feast at the banquet of the lamb in the city of God (Revelation 19:9).

Establishing an exercise regimen is another way in which we may practice care of our bodily selves. Exercise relieves feelings of stress and muscle tension while stimulating the production of endorphin hormones that contribute to a sense of well-being. Exercise need not require expensive clothing or equipment. A brisk daily walk can do wonders for the maintenance of physical and emotional health as can the practice of exercise forms that increase oxygen consumption, such as Tai Chi. As the counterpart to exercise, we might also devote some time to the practice of relaxation, making use of such techniques as deep breathing or guided

imagery. Use of joyful music has also been found to contribute to the release of endorphins, as has humorous reading that evokes laughter.

INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

Rand Conger, Ph.D., Glen H. Elder, Ph.D., and their colleagues conducted longitudinal studies of American families affected by the farm crisis of the 1980s. Since 1989, they have tracked 500 people in order to get a long-term view of the ways in which economic hardship affects individuals and families. As noted in an article, "Tools for Tough Times" (Tori DeAngelis, Monitor on Psychology 1/09 vol. 48 #1), these researchers found that maintaining strong family and community ties led to better outcomes, not only during the immediate crisis but over the long-term as well. Thus, investing in relationships within the family and maintaining friendships are primary ways of coping with the economic downturn. When finances are limited, spending a small amount of money to visit a friend or family member or to have lunch or dinner with them can yield a major return. The investment of our time and energy in being attentive to children or other family members or to spending time with friends has the potential to pay dividends in terms of our sense of well-being and happiness.

We are also likely to derive great benefit by maintaining ties to our church, schools, and civic or professional organizations. Participation in church, school or other community or professional projects engenders a sense of productivity and accomplishment that maintains and nourishes the part of our identity we generally derive from our work. If a lay-off or actual job loss deprives us of our usual source of work-related esteem, we may derive satisfaction from learning a new skill, joining a book club, or volunteering for a cause that is of interest to us. Mentoring a young student or teaching English to

an immigrant family are also ways of establishing connections that can increase our sense of emotional connectedness and wellness.

CONTROL SPENDING

As we attempt to deal with financial stress, there are some practical steps we ought to take in order to put our money-matters in order. Scrutinizing ongoing spending to know where our money is actually going, is essential. Although a tedious task, it is important that we comb through our checking accounts and credit card statements in order to get a clear view of our spending habits. Doing so can assist us in identifying our priorities and setting appropriate spending and saving goals. Adopting good money management habits, for example, bringing lunch to work rather than buying it on a daily basis and avoiding late fees or ATM fees for using a non-network machine, can also assist us in regulating the direction and flow of our money. Reassessing our various insurance accounts may identify coverage that is redundant, allowing us to trim costs by eliminating unnecessary coverage. Shifting several insurance accounts to a single company may also make us eligible for multiple policy discounts.

Another area to investigate is our spending habits while shopping. Are we willing to kick the bottled water habit? A good home filtration system may require an initial outlay of about \$200 but, according to Eric Tyson, MBA (Personal Finance for Dummies), many bottled water drinkers spend \$600 to \$800 each year. Are we inclined to pick up last minute items as we wait in line at the grocery checkout counter? Knowing that most of us get bored while waiting, storeowners generally place a variety of enticing small items near the checkout area. Do we take advantage of manufacturers' coupons? Are we willing to buy private label brands or are we slaves to the designer label? Do we make full use of discounts offered through our membership in such organizations as AAA or AARP? Do we make a list of necessary items and stick with it? It can be difficult to resist buying an item that we really do not need because "it's such a good sale." Too often, however, to make full use of the item we need to buy yet another unplanned item, for example, a top to match the slacks we just bought on sale. Do we tend to shop quickly or are we tempted to browse our way through the store aisles? The more time we spend in a store, the more likely we are to buy something, needed or not.

These thoughts on controlling our spending touch only a few of the possible areas in which we can exercise more prudent money management. As we read them and implement those that appear most appropriate, given our individual circumstances, other ideas, tailored to our particular situations, are likely to come to mind. Encourage all the members of the family or religious community to participate in the review so that the entire household can share in the identification of potential sources of saving and strengthen each other's commitment to cut unnecessary expenses and manage money with prudence. This can be an excellent way in which to teach the younger members of the family to make judicious choices as they move toward greater financial independence and personal responsibility.

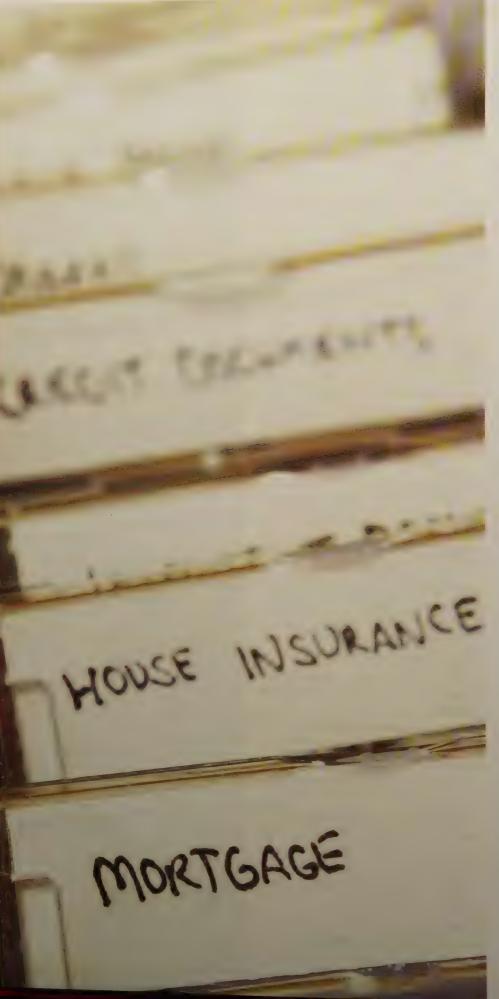
In addition, those preparing to retire or already retired would do well to enter into a financial planning dialogue with their adult children. Rather than wait for a crisis to arise, discuss plans for the future in light of today's financial uncertainties. Perhaps there is a need to delay retirement for a few years in order to shore up a battered portfolio. If, however, you are already retired and have suffered significant losses, it might be useful to discuss a revised budget with your adult children, particularly if there is a possibility of needing assistance from them at some future point or if significant changes are to be made in your estate planning. In the course of a financial planning dialogue, it would also be helpful to discuss issues pertaining to health care. Together with your adult children, you might wish to consider various options and the associated costs connected with Medicare, Medigap insurance, and long-term care policies.

COPING WITH JOB LOSS

As the numbers of workers whose jobs were lost temporarily permanently mounted in the early months of 2009, so too did the levels of anxiety, depression, and marital conflict. Richard H. Price and colleagues at the University of Michigan studied the effects of job loss and presented their findings in a 2002 article in the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology (vol 7 # 4). They found that across all demographic and socioeconomic groups, job loss triggered what they termed "cascade of stressors." Not surprisingly, they observed that the fewer buffers people have, such as a second income or strong social support, the worse the impact of these stressors. In-addition, they observed that persons prone to depression were twice as likely to experience mental health problems in the face of economic stress as were others.

Writing in the Monitor on Psychology, Tori DeAngelis reported that George Washington University psychologist George Howe, Ph.D., posited that people who blame themselves for their situation and have insecure attachment styles are those most likely to suffer depression following job loss. In addition to one's individual characteristics, the interpretation given to the situation of job loss might prove to be more important than the actual job loss itself. In Howe's view, the real stressor lies in one's projection into the future about the meaning of one's not having a job at this moment. Those able to see the job loss as a temporary situation, or even as an invitation to reassess themselves and

They found that across all demographic and socioeconomic groups, job loss triggered what they termed a "cascade of stressors."



their occupational goals, are far more likely to weather the storm with a minimum of emotional disturbance than are those who take a negative view, thinking, for example, that they would never again be able to get or keep a job.

Price and his colleagues developed an intervention in 1981 for job seekers who are prone to depression. In this intervention, job seekers were assisted in developing practical skills and the confidence needed to find employment. During their training, they practiced interviewing skills and engaged in problem-solving activities to help cope with job-seeking stress and setbacks. In Price's perspective, the most important components of the intervention were those that empowered participants to rethink themselves and take risks. Price's program has been implemented under the name JOBS in a number of cities in the U.S. and abroad. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has endorsed it as one of their model programs. While it may not be possible to access this specific program in a given area, many programs geared toward assisting those seeking employment have based themselves on a similar philosophy and incorporated similar elements to empower participants while establishing networks of support and encouragement.

ECONOMIC STRESS: A PATHWAY TO SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

While there are certainly highly negative and painful aspects of the current economic downturn, there may be, nevertheless, an opportunity for spiritual development and deepening. Kimberly Palmer, writing for U.S. News and World Report (2/10/09) listed "Become More Charitable" as one of five ways to be happy in a recession. As she observed, "If you are feeling impoverished, a way to counteract that feeling is to do something generous." Generosity need not take

the form of a monetary donation. Instead, one may offer gifts of time and service.

SIMPLICITY OF LIFE

A number of us, especially those already thinking in terms of end of life issues, may have felt a call to examine our lifestyles in order to practice a greater degree of simplicity. An article by Duane Elgin, "Planting a Lenten Garden of Simplicity," posted 3/07/09 on http://www.inwardoutward.org, sponsored by Church of the Savior, outlined ten forms of simplicity that might provide us with some insights. Elgin highlighted such elements as ecological, economic, frugal and uncluttered simplicity among others.

Ecological simplicity speaks of choosing ways of living that touch the earth lightly and reduce our environmental impact while fostering a deep reverence for the community of life. We might consider ways in which we can reduce the size of our carbon footprint by implementing "reduce, reuse and recycle" principles.

Economic simplicity comprises many forms of "right livelihood" in the forms of healthy and sustainable products and services from home-building materials and energy systems to food and transportation. Although sometimes less convenient, making use of public transportation, for example, can assist in cutting greenhouse emissions from our automobiles.

The concept of frugal simplicity encourages cutting back on spending that is not truly serving our lives, practicing skillful management of personal finances in order to achieve greater financial independence and the opportunity to consciously choose our path through life while decreasing our consumption and, as a result, freeing up resources to be available for others. Rather than subscribing to the "shop 'til you drop" mentality, we might be inclined to act with greater consciousness and deliberation when considering our purchases.

Uncluttered simplicity, as Elgin proposes it, means taking charge of lives that are too busy, stressed and fragmented and that interfere with our ability to focus on essentials, however we define them, in terms of our unique lives. If we were to reduce the clutter in our lives, we might find ourselves blessed with gifts of time and serenity.

HAVING ENOUGH

Another concept that we might profit from examining in greater depth is that of "having enough." If we recall the instructions accompanying God's gift of manna to the Israelites during their sojourn in the desert, we find they were told to gather just enough for the needs of a single day, save on the day prior to the Sabbath when they were to gather enough for two days (Ex 16:4, 5). In the Lord's Prayer we also pray for our daily bread (Like 11:3), not for a lifetime supply to be given all at once and hoarded. Gilbert K. Chesterton, a British Catholic writer, observed, "There are two ways to get enough. One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less." Although speaking of the financial crisis on a larger scale than that of personal consumption and spending, Allan Sloan (Washington Post) prompts us to a personal examination of our concepts of need, want and desire.

A number of Buddhist practitioners also have written about the need to break the destructive cycle of consumption, release ourselves from the clutches of greed and live in a mindful way that frees us from the addiction of compulsive buying habits. Psychologist Dan Baker, Ph.D., in his book What Happy People Know, (Rodale 2003) also indicated that a major happiness trap is trying to buy happiness. In his opinion, the lust to possess—desire divorced from need or, as he termed it, "wanton wanting"—is at the heart of much of our unhappiness. He perceived our desire to accumulate objects as an outgrowth of our hunter/gatherer heritage. Strategies that once helped ensure our survival, however, have lost their links to the simple fulfillment of basic needs for sustenance. Instead, we are now inclined to hunt obsessively for some possession that will answer the questions "Will I have enough?" and, at a deeper level, "Am I enough?"

PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Another excellent spiritual practice is that of gratitude. Fostering a spirit of thanksgiving for the simple abundance of the earth and for the many blessings bestowed on us is an excellent antidote to the stress of these difficult times. Developing a sense of appreciation for the good things and good persons in our lives, not simply taking them for granted, is one of the first steps toward conquering the fears and tensions that are generated in times of financial stress. Expressing gratitude for the first signs of spring, for the fresh produce of the summer garden, for the bright colors of autumn and the stark beauty of the winter landscape can lead to a sense of quiet awe and wonder that lies at the heart of cosmic consciousness and prayer. Fostering a spirit of gratitude for the significant people in our lives, thanking them for the small acts of kindness and concern that make daily living harmonious and enjoyable, reminds us that the love given us is all grace. A number of persons have made use of gratitude journals in which they record three or five items or events each day for which they are grateful. This practice is especially helpful when working with persons who suffer from a sense of unworthiness, isolation or of deep pessimism that so often accompanies the hopelessness of depression. But the practice of gratitude is beneficial for all of us. In the U.S., we celebrate Thanksgiving Day, as do our neighbors to the north. While there are those who view the day as an affront to the First Peoples of our country, nevertheless, it is a day for expressing gratitude for the



blessings bestowed on our land and may serve as a reminder to practice justice and good stewardship, seeking the welfare of those seven generations into the future.

POOR IN SPIRIT

Over the years we have read and meditated on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that begins with the injunction frequently translated by the words "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). Many commentaries and homilies have addressed this first of the eight beatitudes in an effort to explain just what Jesus meant. These efforts likely were deemed necessary because few of us are inclined to take Jesus' words literally. Being poor and being blessed appear to most of us as a contradiction in terms. We are far more inclined to join the War on Poverty in order to build the Great Society or other similar causes. Luke's version of the Sermon on the Plain includes the words "But woe to you who are rich" (Luke 6:24). This is definitely not something most of us would care to dwell on for any length of time lest it trouble our consciences. And yet, in this time of economic downturn, forced by circumstances to pare away many aspects of the materialistic and consumer-oriented culture we once thought essential to our happiness, we may find ourselves invited to examine these and other gospel passages anew and to appreciate them from a different perspective.

Although written over forty years ago, Poverty of Spirit, by Johannes Baptist Metz remains a wonderful resource for reading, reflection, and prayer, especially in times of economic turmoil and stress. Metz speaks of the poverty of Jesus who took on our flesh and, clinging to nothing, emptied himself and became human (Philippians 2:5-8). He presents a portrait of Jesus who experienced the poverty of human existence more deeply than any other person could, seeing clearly its many facets, even those shadow elements most of us never fathom. For Metz, poverty is not just another one of the many virtues held up for our emulation. In his opinion, poverty is a necessary element in any authentic Christian attitude toward life. The other beatitudes mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount are simply variations on the motif of spiritual poverty which he identifies as the nexus, the point where God and humanity encounter each other, where infinite mystery and concrete existence meet.

Metz highlighted six forms that our poverty as human beings takes. The first he named the poverty of the commonplace, that poverty of the average person's life, devoid of heroism and ecstasy, the poverty of having only empty hands. While our hands might not be totally empty, many of us still experience the poverty of our need to work each day in order to provide the basics of food and shelter for our families and ourselves. Our jobs may be considered rather humdrum and our lives seen as ordinary with little in them

that would serve to bring us either fame or fortune.

A second form of poverty Metz indicated was the poverty of misery and neediness that makes us kin with Jesus who knew hunger, exile and the loneliness of the outcast. This form of poverty is one often experienced by members of our immigrant communities who are able to obtain only low-paying jobs and feel cut off from relatives and friends left behind in the home country. It is a poverty we also share during times of transition as we move from one area to another or one job situation to another. The sense of exile arises when we are cut off from former securities and obliged to find our way within a new situation that may or may not be of our choosing or to our liking.

In contrast to these first two forms of poverty, Metz also highlighted the poverty of uniqueness and superiority, a type of poverty he termed the "honor and burden of the great people of history." He identified persons who were called to exercise exceptional missions and to assume responsibilities as experiencing this sort of spiritual poverty. Their temptation is to "be like the rest of humanity," to renounce the poverty of their highly unique personalities, and to seek to eliminate the painful loneliness that results from their individuality. Willingness to practice this form of spiritual poverty, even if only to a lesser degree, however, enables us to find our true self and fulfill the mission entrusted to us.

Three other forms of spiritual poverty highlighted by Metz include the poverty of our provisional nature, the poverty of finiteness, and the poverty of death. Surrendering to the poverty of our provisional nature rescues us from sterile routine and illusory self-evidence of the habitual. It fosters recognition of the prophets of a future promise who, deeply rooted in our historical heritage, nevertheless challenge us to step out from a hard and fast Pharisaical acceptance of the present into the potentials offered us in the provisional future. It is a reminder that everything on earth is subject to change and an invitation to accept the inevitable changes with grace, trusting that God's divine providence will be with us on the journey.

Accepting the poverty of our finiteness involves the sacrifice and surrender of other possibilities in favor of actualizing one or a few in the concrete circumstances of our lives. It involves accepting the fact that at moments of decision we need to act within the limits of our knowledge. Accepting this sort of poverty encourages us to consider our choices carefully and to take responsibility for the consequences of these choices, including those consequences that could not be foreseen due to our finite knowledge when a specific decision was made. Recognition of our poverty in this area might well inspire us to pray for the Spirit's gift of wisdom as this gift imparts to us the ability to make right judgments in both ordinary and spiritual matters.

In the end, however, all these facets of poverty are simply the prelude to our experiencing the poverty of death that leaves us only the power of self-abandonment as we echo the cry of Jesus on the Cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). At this point we must, like it or not, set aside our attachments to created things, to loved ones, to life itself. Stripped of all the masks we have worn over the course of our lives and having let go of all our cherished illusions about ourselves and our importance in this world, we find ourselves free to enter into the fullness

of life in union with Jesus, who became poor for us, humbling himself and becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8).

LOOKING AHEAD

June 2010 will mark three years since the Bear Sterns hedge funds collapsed in 2007. Since then, many changes have occurred that, in various ways, affected every segment of our society and each of us individually, as families, and as members of our local communities. Predictions about the future vary from modestly optimistic views to those that speak of more and deeper pain to come. Whatever the future holds, we might take comfort in the loving kindness of the Holy One as expressed in Matthew 6:25, "Therefore do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about the body, what you will wear." Reminding us that we are of more value than the birds of the air or the lilies of the field, Jesus assures us that our heavenly Father knows of our need for these things and will provide for us. We might also wish to pray for enlightenment as we reflect on Matthew's words, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19, 21). We might join our prayer to that of Thomas Merton expressed in his book, Thoughts in Solitude and quoted as part of the Friday prayers in A Book of Hours: "My hope is in what the hand has never touched. Do not let me trust what I can grasp between my fingers. Death will loosen my grasp and my vain hope will be gone." In the end, our task is to "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33) and God's generosity will see to it all that we need will be given.

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r. Thomas Holmes and Dr. Rahe Richard University of Washington Medical School created a stress scale, (The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale) assigning a certain number to each life event. Holmes and Rahe hypothesized that if the cumulative number of the various life events experienced within a period of time reached a certain threshold, the chances of the individual being diagnosed with a serious illness was extremely high. The life experiences that earned the highest numbers were related to loss: the death of spouse, divorce, marital separation, death of a close family member, etc. This test, with the opportunity to talk with a therapist online, is available online (http://www.findingstone.com/ services/tests/stresstest.htm).

During a recent parish mission we encountered a number of people who spoke about personal and family tragedies and losses. There seemed to be an inordinate number of people who had cancer or who lost a spouse to cancer. Based on Holmes and Rahe's research, the experiences of these parishioners should have produced extremely high levels of stress. However, this was not the case. Although these individuals had undergone very painful and traumatic experiences, there was a surprising absence of stress in their lives.

Our first reaction was surprise. Upon further reflection, we recalled an article by James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., published in Human Development in 1980. Father Gill distinguished between stressors and stress. Each of the tragedies and losses encountered by these individuals were stressors, i.e., incidents that had the potential to produce stress. Stressors, however, do not automatically result in stress. The result depends upon the response of the individual. As Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, has stated, "Mystics and madmen swim in the same water. One drowns and the other is reborn." Campbell's insight helps shed light on what we were observing in these faith-filled parishioners. It was the depth of their faith that prevented the stressor from evolving into stress. No one has to be a victim of her or his life experiences. Stressors do not have to inevitably result in stress. Ultimately, each of us has control over whether we drown or are reborn. One of the best defenses against stress is a strong faith life

We interviewed forty-two women and men for our book The Collaborative Leader. These individuals, by the way they lived their values in the workplace, gave witness to the essence of Christianity. We called them "Wisdom People." One question raised during the interviews was, "Where do you experience stress?" Almost to a person they had difficulty identifying stress in their lives. These Wisdom People were individuals who held very strong Christian values and consciously attempted to live these values everyday in their lives. We are convinced that the absence of stress was a direct result of their strong faith. When pushed to pursue the question about stress further, those who were employers were able to identify only two areas of stress: when they had to fire someone, or when economics prevented them from being more generous to their employees.

We have worked in over two hundred dioceses on six continents. Much of our ministry has been in working with lay, ordained and professed church leaders. Based on our experiences, we have identified two major areas that are potential stressors: loss and unrealistic expectations.

LOSS

We observe rampant losses in the personal lives of many of the people we encounter. In addition, church leaders increasingly face the varied and profound losses experienced by many in their dioceses and parishes.

Parishes and schools are being closed. Parishes that have always had a pastor, "their priest," find that they must now often share that priest with one or more parishes. The economic situation is causing the elimination of valuable. committed church workers. The losses experienced have not only been the tangible ones such as these, but also the more ethereal ones, for example, the loss of a dream. Many of the more traditional members of congregations are still grieving the loss of a church that was the foundation of their lives. They have been unable to cope with the many changes ushered in by the Second Vatican Council. More recently, the sexual abuse scandal has left Catholics grieving the trust that they always believed they could have in their priests and religious.

All losses are stressors. One of the dynamics that makes loss especially painful and that exerts such power in the lives of people is the fact that grieving is never completed. Whenever there is an experience of a loss in the present, it resurrects the unfinished grieving from the losses of the past.

There are a number of concrete steps that can reduce the amount of stress generated by loss. Here are a few.

Take time to embrace the loss. Allow yourself to experience the conflicting emotions that are rampant during loss. Failure to take this first step will dramatically increase the stress.

Accept all the myriad feelings that accompany the experience of loss. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that emotions are neither positive nor negative, and they are certainly not sinful. Jesus was a man of many emotions and Jesus was incapable of sinning. One of the major emotions experienced at times of loss is anger. For some Christians it is very difficult to accept certain emotions, such as anger. The formation of the past, which sometimes labeled anger as bad

and sinful, makes it very difficult to accept feelings of anger.

Talk about the feelings. This is often the most difficult step. Talking about feelings and emotions resurrects that unfinished business of the past. While there may be a desire to talk about the feelings, there is often a corresponding fear. Feelings are often verbalized indirectly through symbols of loss. This explains the phenomenon observed in parishes when the removal of an altar railing or statue results in powerful reactions by parishioners.

Consciously enter into the grieving process. The more losses that have been repressed in the past, the greater the amount of grieving that must be addressed in the present. Sometimes religion has tended to overly spiritualize the loss and avoid the grieving. The amount of grieving that is required differs from person to person and is influenced by how loss has been embraced in the past.

Ritualize the loss. The church is rich in ritual. Some families, communities and cultures have developed powerful rituals to deal with loss. Consult some of the spiritual literature which offers a variety of suggestions for ritualizing loss. For example, some ethnic communities have a mass 30 days after the death, and again on the one year anniversary of the death.

Allow new people into your life and embrace the new experiences of life. Christians claim to be death-and-resurrection people. The challenge is to rise above the dying and grieving and to adopt the new life that is being offered by the Lord.

By following these steps you assume control over the losses and prevent them from causing undue stress. You can help to transform the losses into opportunities for growth and transformation.

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

One of the most powerful causes of stress that we have observed among church leaders is the internalization of unrealistic expectations. The number of expectations currently thrust onto church leaders appears to be increasing disproportionally. This is occurring at the same time that the number of fulltime ministers, especially priests and religious, seems to be decreasing. Remember that these external expectations that have their genesis in others are merely stressors. They become stress when these expectations are internalized and become the criteria by which one monitors his or her expectations. The expectations of others do not produce stress. Each person is free to accept or reject these external expectations. The inherent problem can be found in the characteristics that are common to many church ministers.

The Future of Religious Life in the United States Study discovered that the most caring members of religious congregations scored above ninety percent on a scale of "niceness." Even though this characteristic sounds positive, it is not. These are people whose niceness serves as a deterrent to dealing with some of the more problematic realities of life, like anger and conflict. Nice people are primary candidates for stress because their needs result in an internalizing of the expectations of others thus producing stress.

Research on priests revealed similar characteristics among priests. Priests differed from other men in two ways. One, they die younger than men in general. This was attributed to the fact that men who live alone die younger, and many priests, even when they live with others, tend to live an isolated life. The second way in which priests differed from other men is that they are more "tender-minded." Tender-minded individuals are more gentle, loving and compassionate, but they also have a greater need to be accepted and loved. These excessive needs for acceptance and love are what can result in stress. These priests have a tendency to try to live up to the expectations of others. They have difficulty in saying no and setting limits. This inability to set realistic limits often results in burnout. We have observed an extremely high level of burnout among many priests, and burnout can result in tired, depressed individuals. We offer some recommendations for avoiding the stress of unrealistic expectations.

It is imperative to have people in your life who know and care for you and to whom you have given permission to confront and challenge you when they see you assuming unrealistic expectations. They are people whom you trust and with whom you share honestly and openly. These listening friends, though, must realize that when they offer you honest feedback, it will not always be graciously received. Frequently when people are experiencing burnout, they respond with hostility even to those who are their closest friends and allies.

Allow others to see your pain, hurt and vulnerability. We have encountered many leaders in ministry who find it difficult to let others see their humanness. Those who are unable or unwilling to share their vulnerability live extremely lonely lives. There is some dynamic in their personality that interferes with their ability to disclose their brokenness. Those individuals who are able to share their humanity, however, usually find compassionate responses from the people they encounter in their ministry.

Be as compassionate, loving and gentle with yourself as you are with those to whom you minister. Most ministers, by their very nature, seem to incorporate these qualities. People who are compassionate, loving and gentle are attracted to ministry. The problem is that while ministers tend to extend these qualities to others, they are often not very compassionate, loving, gentle, tender and forgiving toward themselves. Again, it may have been something in the formation of the past that militates against applying these Christian attitudes toward oneself.

Be like Jesus. In an article in Sisters Today George Wilson described the number of times that Jesus said no and set limits. When we are unable to say no and set realistic limits we are not being Christ-like.

CONCLUSION

Stress is inevitable. It is part of the human condition. However, we have much more control over stress than we sometimes acknowledge. If we wish to reduce the amount of stress in our lives we must take personal responsibility and not allow the many stressors to destroy us. When we allow stress to dominate our lives, we become sad, tired, depressed individuals and our spirituality suffers. Ronald Rolheiser has said, "The opposite of being spiritual is to have lost all zest for living."

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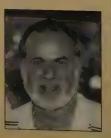
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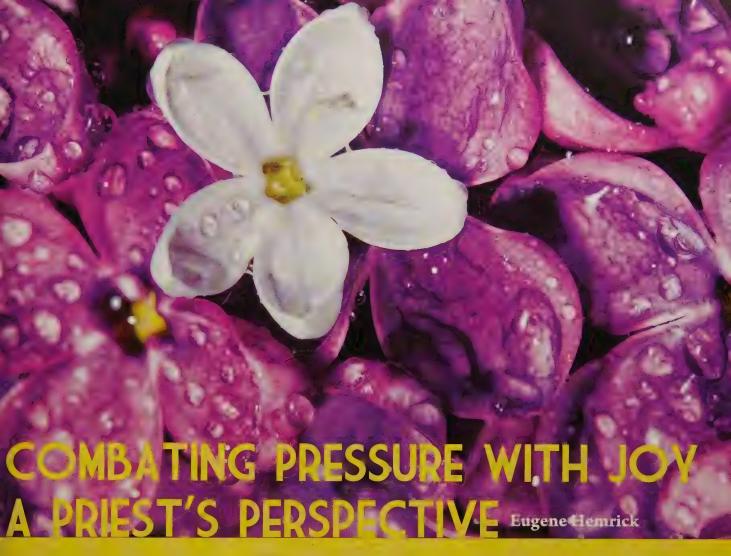
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n this life, no one is exempt from undesirable pressure. Pressure denotes affliction, being squeezed, compressed, crushed and crowded. When it takes hold of us, it can take the very breath out of our spirit. Yet pressure also has a good side—it connotes hugging. When we love a person, we apply pressure in order to squeeze him or her closer to us. Another positive aspect of pressure is that it encourages us to address issues needing immediate attention. It is the perfect remedy for procrastination and inaction.

The topic of pressure has been a concern of mine for more than thirty years as a priest and social-science researcher. In this article, I wish to address the pressures priests experience in particular, and what I have learned during my lifetime about coping with them. I hope that not only my

fellow priests, but others who read this article, can benefit from my experience

THE PRESSURES OF MINISTRY

Priestly ministry, like most public ministries, contends with unpredictable and unexpected pressure-filled moments. As a young priest, it was common to be called out in the middle of the night to administer the last rites to dying parishioners. Funerals were frequent, requiring us to drop our planned schedules and attend to the bereaved. After celebrating a morning Mass, people often came to the sacristy unannounced needing counseling or confession. Less common, but not unusual, were perplexed or angry people who didn't agree about this or that and would unload on us. And then

there were the little mundane pressures like toilets clogging or something breaking down.

Mundane happenstances, psychological, physical, spiritual and personal problems are an integral part of priestly ministry, and as one wise old priest reminded me, "They go with the territory." However, when they become accumulative and gang up on us in the short space of an hour or day, they can become crippling if not handled properly.

During my first parish assignment, I remember almost losing my composure after a hectic evening in which I listened to one problem after the other. In one of the counseling sessions, a couple nearly came to blows. After the last appointment, I took a long walk and wondered whether anyone in the parish was happy, or for that matter, sane. That night was a good learning

experience in that it taught me how much the problems of others can weigh on us even though they aren't our problems.

These days priests not only experience this kind of pressure, but they also face a new and more pressing one: ministering to multiple parishes. During a talk at a convocation of priests in the Midwest I asked, "How many of you have two parishes?" Several priests laughed and said, "You're asking the wrong question. How about three or four parishes!"

I once rode with a priest who was serving several parishes. Such priests are sometimes called circuit riders, an image that dates back to the days when priests were few and rode horseback from one town to another to minister to their people. As glamorous as that may seem, most of those priests burned out. Without question, serving parishioners in multiple parishes is one of today's biggest pressures for priests.

PRESSURE IS EVERYWHERE

Priests aren't the only ones experiencing new and weightier pressures. I frequently wonder how parents survive raising children these days. Feeding, clothing and tending to them is a twenty-four-hour, nonstop task and is very expensive. Sickness and the worry it creates, and trying to hold down a job while being a parent can make family life anything but a calm existence.

Families are not alone in experiencing undue pressure. As free-wheeling as

persons living an unmarried single life may seem, a closer look reveals that they too experience enormous pressures. In the morning I routinely look out my apartment window and watch young single women and men hurrying off to work and wonder about the pressures they face. In our tight job market they have to worry about job security. They too are troubled about the next bill to be paid, their college loans and when or if they will meet the right person for marriage. They worry about health insurance and who will take care of them if they are sick. As we can see, no walk of life is exempt from the weight of daily pressures.

JOY, THE BEST ANTIDOTE

One of the questions I am asked as a priest is how I have coped with pressures over the years. As one layperson half jokingly put it, "As a priest who has God's ear, what has God taught you about coping successfully with pressures?"

Recently I came across Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation on Christian Joy (Gaudete in Domino, May 9, 1975). To my surprise, I found he identifies the very means I employ when grappling with pressures. I learned early on in my priesthood that joy is the best antidote against extreme pressures! (It should be noted here that joy is an essential quality of love, and that ultimately we are talking about love.) What is the meaning of joy, and how should we practice it in everyday life?

Pope Paul VI tells us that joy is finding peace and satisfaction in

possessing a known and loved good. When we possess that good, it creates harmony with nature, with people and with ourselves. St. Thomas Aquinas adds an important dimension to joy in stating that joy is to desire as motion is to rest.

When we combine Pope Paul's idea of joy with that of Aquinas, we learn that once we possess a loved good, an inner harmony is created. Possessing a loved good and having our desire fulfilled is the key to being at rest and countering the restlessness that pressures create. Having our heart's desire puts us at ease. In other words, the pressure is off.

These are profound philosophical and theological ideas. How do they apply to everyday life, and how do they counter pressure?

JOY IN CREATION

The first source of joy that Pope Paul VI points us to is the joy of creation. Simply put, it means drinking in the beauty of creation and allowing the elation it contains to raise our spirits. The Canticle of Daniel (3:57–88, 56) captures this spirit *par excellence*.

Bless the Lord and the works of the Lord.

You heavens bless the Lord.
All you waters above the heavens, bless the Lord.

Sun and moon, bless the Lord. Stars of heaven, bless the Lord. All you winds, bless the Lord.



One by one the canticle ticks off God's gifts of creation, reminding us to stop and note their beauty, and to rejoice in and be grateful for their abundance. It is a canticle of celebration filled with the joy of God's nature. In all humility I have not only prayed this canticle, but lived it.

I live close to the botanical gardens in Washington, D.C. This year's flower arrangements were spellbinding. I often went down to see them and each time I did I said to myself, "Only God could create the awesome mixture of dazzling colors contained in these flowers!"

The exaltation that comes from stopping to smell the roses is not only one of my most meaningful joys, but my means for reducing pressure. When we let our spirit become uplifted by the awesomeness of God's nature, the very powers of our spirit needed to support weighty pressures are generated.

THE JOY OF WORK WELL DONE

Happiness over work well done is a second source of joy. Here we have the picture of stepping back, admiring the fruits of our labor and letting the moment fill us with happiness.

In my seminary days I worked as a gardener during the summer. That time was one of the most enjoyable periods in my life. Why was this so? Because I used to step back after a day's work and imbibe the joy of work well done. I remember planting flower beds and at the end of the day standing there in admiration of the way they enhanced the surroundings of the mansion where I worked. There were also times when I would cut the lawn in a unique pattern and relish the novel geometric designs.

What made that period in my life so wonderful was coming home at night and falling asleep thinking about the beauty I had seen and created. It taught me that if we take joy in our work, it can produce the heavenly sleep and rest needed to generate the strength for meeting the pressures of the next day.

I need to add here that years later I came across the spiritual practice of theological reflection, which deepened my practice of reflecting on the day and relishing its moments. Theological reflection encourages us to review our day each night, to reflect on the people with whom we have had a significant encounter, and to recall how full of grace the day was. This practice taught me that each day we have a good number of significant encounters with people, many of which are very nourishing and joyful. We may have received a compliment here, an encouraging word there, or had a friend truly listen to us in a moment of stress. We should reflect on such moments repeatedly because they contain joys that should be preserved. Theological reflection reminds us to rejoice in these moments and to thank God for the grace and strength of spirit they contain—the very strength needed to stand strong against pressures.

A WAY OUT OF DEPRESSION

One of the most devastating pressures I hope to never experience again is the darkness of depression. Thanks to my gardening experience and a wise old Benedictine monk I was able to subdue it before it took hold of me.

I had changed jobs after working twenty years at the bishops' conference in Washington, D.C. In hindsight, the move proved to be a blessing. However, at the time of the change I was twenty years older than when I first came to the conference. In trying to make the adjustment, I quickly learned that I wasn't as flexible and free-spirited as when I had begun.

My new job was in the president's office of the Catholic University of America. It was nothing like my past position as director of research. There were new routines, extensive travel, many more meetings, and I didn't have the community life of priests I had enjoyed while living at the staff house of

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the bishops' conference. I found myself alone and filled with anxieties in a completely new and unfamiliar world. One day I arrived at work not knowing how I got there. This experience was the result of the extreme pressure I was undergoing. I also feared that I didn't have the strength needed for my new job, or the luxury of time and the breathing space that goes with conducting research.

After a severe panic attack, I happened to remember the words of an old Benedictine monk who taught at St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, Illinois. Periodically he would tell his class, "You have enough under your scull cap, now it is time to get dirt under your finger nails," and off the class would go to work on the adjoining farm.

Remembering this, I dropped everything I was doing, put on coveralls and returned to my days of gardening, pruning trees, cutting lawns, planting and digging up weeds. Each evening I came home filthy and exhausted. And to my delight, within a week I was back to normal.

That experience taught me an enormous lesson in combating pressure. When we use our hands, work with soil and imbibe in the outdoors, it is therapy par excellence. Why is this so?

One reason is that our hands contain touch and are one of our best means for keeping us in touch. When anxieties attack us, it is common to freeze up, become paralyzed and lose touch with everything. We tend to go into a protective shell and avoid all forms of contact. Manual labor forces us to break out of our shell and move into action. It puts us back into contact.

When we work with the earth's soil, we are put in direct touch with life itself because from the earth comes all that sustains our life: food and water. When pressures take hold, it is common to become divorced from all forms of life because we blame life for our pressures. To reunite with it through the soil is an excellent way of reminding us that the earth is our friend and is there to help us. Watching seeds produce new life and growth is life-giving.

I once had the opportunity to take a cycling tour through Germany. There I learned yet another lesson for combating pressure. It was common to see elderly couples hiking up mountain passes. Many Germans consider the outdoors to be therapeutic and a way of staying fit. In conversations with them, I learned that they find a healing power in nature that keeps their spirits uplifted and their bodies in shape. Getting out can be a way for all of us to get away from the pressure that can take hold of us. The clear, fresh air the outdoors provides is an excellent way to clear your head.

THE JOY OF SERVICE

The joy of sharing and serving is yet another source of joy to which Pope Paul points us.

Bill Gates and his wife Melinda reflected this perspective when they were asked why they were so generous

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in funding projects that fight malaria. Gates replied, "God has been very good to us. Now it is time to pay back that goodness by sharing it with others." When he said this, you could see him light up.

No doubt all of us have felt at times the same uplifting and freeing spirit that Bill Gates reflected. When we give of ourselves, the inner harmony of which Pope Paul spoke surfaces, causing real joy—the joy that contains the perfect antidote to pressure.

THE JOY OF SANCTIFIED LOVE

The joy of sanctified love is yet another source of joy. In his exhortation, Pope Paul observes that we have lost the meaning of sanctified love and hence the meaning of true happiness. He writes:

Technological society has succeeded in multiplying the opportunities for pleasure, but it has great difficulty in generating joy. For joy comes from another source. It is spiritual. Money, comfort, hygiene and material security are often not lacking; and yet boredom, depression and sadness unhappily remain the lot of many. These feelings sometimes go as far as anguish and despair, which apparent care-freeness, the frenzies of present good fortune and artificial

I believe that our culture has lost much of its sense of true joy and that behind this is the missing sense of a sanctified life. One look at the way marriage, home life, the business world and government are portrayed in the media immediately tells us that something critical is missing for their well being. More often than not, we are seeing marriage portrayed as a convenient bond rather than a sacred bond, home life as hectic and dysfunctional rather than as a sacred community, the business world and government as dog-eat-dog jobs rather than sacred duties. Asking what really counts in life for our salvation isn't politically correct. Questioning what is and is not authentic isn't relevant. Speaking of God isn't acceptable in our growing pluralistic society.

Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as a God of joy who desires joy for us and who has provided joy throughout his creation. In doing this, God has deemed us and his creation sacred. When sacredness is no longer respected, joy too is diminished.

SENSING THE SACRED LEADS TO JOY

In pointing us to the sacred as a source of joy, Pope Paul alludes to the ultimate weapon for combating the deadly effects of pressure. When we are under extreme pressure, a sense of the sacred reminds us that God is ultimately in charge of our life. The Germans have the word weltanschauung, meaning

world view. The way we see the world often dictates how best we can cope with it and its pressures. When we see pressures through the eyes of the world, they become necessary, meaningless evils. When they are envisioned through the eyes of God, they are seen as coming from God for a purpose, and encourage us to pursue that purpose. Searching for and seeing God's purpose is our best means for deflating the pressures we feel.

CONCLUSION

These are my secrets for coping with pressure. Allow me to share one more with you. When I intone "Lift up your hearts," at Mass, I recall the qualities of joy we have discussed and pray for the grace of God to practice at least one of them during the day. All it takes is enjoying the elation caused by a beautiful flower arrangement or sharing my good fortune with a street person, for me to become uplifted and stronger, despite the pressures of daily life.



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Jesuit friend with whom I have spent quite a few vacations surprised me last summer. We were in a cabin near Lake Tahoe, and I must have been composing something, for he said, out of the blue, "You really manage your time." He said it even with some admiration, not criticism; and what he said was true, though it had never dawned on me in those terms.

Managing time—what was my companion referring to? Probably the fact that I have plans for whatever spare time I can find, and I make use of that time. Doesn't everybody plan their day just as strictly? The answer is, apparently not.

How did I come to be this way? The seminary formation partly explains. Our days were divided up minutely. Spiritual reading, memorization, prayer, recreation—we were expected to change channels abruptly, often enough on the half-hour. If you had some kind of independent project underway, you had to sandwich it in at odd moments, which were rare. People have asked me over the years, "When do you find time to write poetry?" My answer always has been, "I don't find it, I steal it." That overdramatizes my sense of time and agenda, but not by much!

This attitude or impulse of managing time can be quite productive, but it has its shadow side. It means the motor stays running. It means, when a conversation ceases to be substantive or goes on too long, I become antsy. It means I chafe when caught in a long line or a doctor's office without a book! And what imprecations can form when I am at work on something like this essay and the phone rings. Incidentally, what ever happened to my days off, or the TV shows everyone talks about? I am hardly talking about big-time stress-an unresolved conflict, a desperate worry—but a small-time variety that is invasive to real peace.

Years ago, as a college teacher, I helped one of my students to conduct some poetry exercises for children in elementary school. We resorted to Kenneth Koch's wonderful method, which he brought to life in Wishes, Lies and Dreams. Koch has a unit on metaphors, which my student applied. Among other tidbits, she got this wonderful line back from a sixth grader: "Clocks is something that we are all run by." From the mouths of children!

It is not just Type A business executives who are run by clocks. Religious women of a certain age, who

have gone through the same conditioning as myself, have a notable allegiance to the clock. How many parties, or serious events, I have attended where people drift in at various times; but not the sisters, they are right there at the determined hour.

A Buddhist sister, Annabel Laity, has contributed a fine anecdote that can serve as antidote. In her introduction to the *Essential Writings* of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk (Modern Spiritual Masters Series, Orbis Books), she relates an incident from Plum Village in France, where Thich Nhat Hanh is centered. She uses the name he is known by among his followers, Thay.

One day Thay suggested that I come and help him print several hundred copies of the Plum Village newsletter. I arrived early in the morning ready to start work straightaway. I knew we had a busy day ahead. . . [But] he suggested that we have a cup of tea. Offering tea to his disciples is one of Thay's favorite ways of teaching. When Thay drinks tea, he only drinks tea. He does not think about the work to be done



Okay, now we start, she thought. But no, the master suggested a walk. "We walked on beautiful little roads in the French countryside." When they came back, he took delight in carefully lighting the wood stove in the printery. He wanted to savor everything Obviously clocks do not run Thich Nhat Hanh.

Can Americans shift into that mode? We are the most impatient people on earth. The question clearly is, Never mind the rest of them, can I shift into that mode? Habit is ingrained, but that does not mean it can't be counteracted. Shall I ever reach the stage of Psalm 131, "I have stilled my soul, / hushed it like a weaned child"? Since we live by the minute, it is possible to keep on trying, that is, to work at it.

A priest who came to me for spiritual direction used to recount a rush of sacramental duties, classes to teach, random visits from parishioners, prayer periods that deprived me of breath just to hear of it. He was trying valiantly to practice what he called "pause prayer"(or call it "time out prayer"), between one call on his attention, one stressor, and the next. Hurray for him.

The little hymn in Spanish, "Un Día a la Vez, Señor"—"One day at a time, Lord"—catches the right tone. And what helps greatly, I believe, is to look at all the things on the agenda, including those pop-up calls that can change a whole day, as opportunities. Sure, they are responsibilities, but what a grouch they can turn us into when viewed that way. No, better, they are opportunities to love God, to serve Jesus Christ in others.

In recent years of ministry to priests, I have come to recognize how much the parish ministry can be one of irruptions and interruptions. That is why the priests on retreat, including the one my poem alludes to, so much welcome this time with Our Lord and one another. Everyone should seek and welcome retreat time. The Mass, nonetheless, is the most available of opportunities to just leave other things in better hands for a while. And just before communion, the Mass affords a priest the special opportunity to pray for entry into the right spirit. "Protect us from all anxiety, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." Don't think this particular priest just slides over that prayer!

RAHESTS

The priests on retreat barely ruffle a concourse of bucks whose home grounds these are.

some beginning to sprout horms. some full-spread, chomping a hedge or plumped down on the grass.

Imagine, an old buck relaxing and not on the run! A dice and her fawn wander somewhern.

The priests lind themselves grace in this peaceable kingdom. The hunt will be an soon enough.

James Forrens, S.J.



oli, n associato Los Allantes, Colifornia

Living Faithfully with Stress

A Religious Woman's Perspective

Peg Maloney, R.S.M.



Indeed, one might even say stressful! It seems to have many layers and sources. What are its causes? Is it only a short-term crisis or the long-term abmosphere of one's life? What are the most effective responses to stress? And for me, this question: How does the fact that I am a woman religious in the twenty-first century help me respond to tension, hassles or worry? And how is my vocation at the same time a source of stress for me?

As I write this article it is the begin ming of the season of Advent, the opening of the new liturgical year. Our HUMAN DEVELOPMENT editor, Bob Hamma picked a perfect time of the year to invite some folks to write about stress. Experiencing stress as a preludeto Christmas is nearly a given these days; it's one 'gift' of the season we generally expect. Perhaps the time of the year doesn't actually make any difference though. As you read this article, spring will be appearing and the joy of Easter will be near and there will be new encounters of stress and anxiety. It seems to have no limited season.

The students and faculty here at Regis University, where I teach and do campus ministry, are busy again because the campus has to look like a Christmas card as soon as the Advent wreath is fit. We start singing the Advent hymns, but they are quickly followed by the Christmas carols; otherwise, the students will be off to their home towns and we will miss their joyful harmony. Then there is the pressure of a semester ending and the changeable weather that can throw all of one's plants up in the air. We just try to keep the commotion in creative tension and manage the stress.

Everyane experiences stress in daily life; we simply can't escape it. But the deeper sources of stress are not the everyday challenges. It is easy to have perspective when me focus just on them. But what about the students may not be returning because a parent has been out of work and can not important of the inition? Or the faculty member who was recently diagnosed with

terminal cancer at the age of fifty-five? Or the adult students at our extension campus who are going to be deployed to Afghanistan? These are the deeper realities that present the real challenges of managing stress.

More than 25 years ago in his famous book, *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck opened with the statement:

Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once that is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.

I do not remember the rest of his book making a great impression, but I do recall that the opening statement in his book provided an invitation for lots of mental gymnastics, late night conversations and a phrase that became a regular part of my vocabulary, "holding the mystery."

LIVING WITH PARADOX

What does it mean for me, as a religious woman, to live faithfully while confronting stress? Without trying to compare my levels of stress or anxiety with anyone else's, I begin with the recognition that religious life in North America today can be a major stressor in and of itself. It can also be a tremendous source of support during very difficult times. It is a lifestyle that is fundamentally counter-cultural, while at the same time quite liberating. As with most of the Christian journey, it is beset with paradoxes and calls for an attitude of "holding the mystery."

I am in a committed relationship with Jesus Christ, the People of God, and in a particular way with the Sisters of Mercy. These are the relationships that most often nurture my spirit and break my heart, the most fertile ground for sin and grace.

By the profession of vows, I don't own things individually; I do not enter into marriage and family life; I discern choices—whether about work, study, living arrangements or other adventures in life—through prayer and conversation with other sisters or leaders in the congregation. So, by this very vocation, religious women are engaged in a lifestyle that situates us in a grouping that might be described as strange, or at least atypical for twenty-first-century North America.

The stressors I face today are probably not particularly unusual. Finding some balance in work, prayer, relationships, family and community is probably the overarching and greatest challenge. Then, there are the more specific challenges that easily become stressors: concern for the needs of a particular student, illness or disability in



myself or others, family relationships, worry about a brother-in-law out of work, spending enough time in prayer, use of finances, ongoing learning, living in a time of war and bitter political divisions, and consideration of a Vatican investigation of religious women in the United States. I consider some of these short-term acute stressors and others to be long-term or persistent stressors. But regardless of their origin or length of stay, these stressors are all capable of doing mental, emotional and bodily harm if ignored or inadequately addressed.

I am beginning to think that stress is a bit like environmental pollution. It is everywhere. Sometimes I see the brown cloud over Denver and other times only clear blue skies. Sometimes stress, like pollution, is visible; other times it is a bit

more camouflaged, but still capable of spreading poison. There are times when I avoid pollution at every turn, and times when the experience of pollution compels me to become more proactive in cleaning up the air, water and city in which I live. Perhaps my responses to stress follow this pattern as well. I approach stress with the same tactics: either I avoid it as much as possible, or it invigorates me to move in a more positive direction. And sometimes it sneaks in, well camouflaged, and poisons my mind, heart and body before I even notice it. Stress is both something I dread and resist, but it has at times proven to be a great stimulus for action.

Peck was right, life is difficult. I don't think I have yet reached the point of truly understanding and accepting that statement and making peace with all the difficulties I face. However, I do know that I have many tools available to help me move toward greater understanding and acceptance. As I seek to manage stress, I seem to gravitate toward what offers me the greatest freedom. Perhaps this is where the phrase, "holding the mystery" allows me the freedom to move with passion in a direction that can bring needed change, or to calm down and live with a certain level of ambiguity and mystery.

PRAYER IN TIMES OF STRESS

Prayer is certainly my first and most trusted help in times of stress, whether the stress emerges from something wonderful or devastating. One of the greatest gifts in my life was the opportunity to make the thirty-day, Ignatian retreat many years ago. The experience was a transformative moment in my relationship with Jesus Christ and it completely changed how I am in relationship with God. The initial retreat experience, the ongoing spiritual direction and the subsequent opportunities to learn more about prayer, human desires, discernment and communication have all contributed to what I consider to be a genuinely loving, creative and intimate relationship. I have learned that I can (and should)

take to Jesus any distress, fear, joy, hope or anxiety that I experience in my day-to-day life. I know, but don't always remember, that Jesus truly lived this difficult and stressful life as a human being and he continued to love no matter what the cost. That is a great source of hope for me. It certainly doesn't erase or necessarily ease the level of stress, but I am reminded over and over that there is one who is a faithful companion who genuinely understands and wants to hear about all of my concerns in life.

THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS

Working in situations and among people for whom I have love and respect is also the cause of stress and also becomes a tool to manage it. The opportunity to engage in the life-giving ministry of teaching and spiritual direction brings about the freedom to use one's talents and gifts in creative and effective efforts. By our human labors we contribute to the common good of our communities and our world. Communicating ideas, sharing values, challenging beliefs, listening to others and waiting for change all incite some level of stress. Successfully moving through those experiences offers fruit and consolation that relieves anxiety and stress.

One of the greatest joys in my life comes from being a part of a large family and living near many siblings, nieces and nephews. A great delight and stress reliever is to spend time with children. Their excitement for life, books, playgrounds, walks, zoos and music is both amazing and contagious. Spending time listening to their stories, watching their enthusiasm and actually playing with children is a strong antidote to anxiety and human distress.

The next approach I find helpful is that of belonging to a community of faithful women. We are bonded to the Catholic Church, in its liturgical life, sacraments, community, social teaching and service. Awareness of the rhythm of our liturgical life allows for a sense of grounding as we move through the hills

and valleys of our life experiences. The sacraments offer us very human and sensual encounters of God's presence and holiness. I find these experiences reach beyond the rational or logical and into the depths where stress and stress relief are often initiated. For me, these moments can provide deep experiences of conversion and healing. Our Mercy congregation is most intimately linked to the person, story and vision of Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine was a profoundly determined, faithful and generous woman who reminds us, "We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back." It is in the "tripping about" that we stumble upon situations that cause stress and "centering our hearts in God" that allows us to cope with stress most effectively.

"YOUR REDEMPTION IS AT HAND"

As I listened to the "Good News" on the first Sunday of Advent, I heard a most astonishing proclamation from Jesus as recorded in Luke's gospel.

Jesus said to his disciples:

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.

"Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:25-28, 34-36).

On first hearing, this doesn't sound like particularly good news. The threats of heaven shaking, people frightened to death and nations in dismay produces some anxiety and stress in me and I immediately wonder if I have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent. Pretty quickly I realize that I do not have the strength to escape, but Jesus promises that when these signs appear we can stand erect and raise our heads because our redemption is at hand. It is not just about the strength I have to escape, but the willingness to be captured and saved. It's living with and holding onto the mysteries of incarnation, death and resurrection.

The same can be said of stress. When looking only at the irritating presence or negative consequences of stress, we can become overwhelmed and feel totally lacking in the strength or ability to escape. However, our Christian vocation reminds us that in baptism we have been claimed for Christ and our journey is not a solo adventure. We have the love and companionship of Jesus and one another. And just as stress has no particular season, neither does the life of faith.

RECOMMENDED READING

Peck, M. S. The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978.



Sister Peg Maloney, R.S.M. has worked in parish and diocesan ministries for the past twenty years. She not teaches religious studing and works in the Office Mission at Regis Universal leading retreats and offer spiritual direction.

A Perspective on Stress Among Roman Catholic Lay Ministers



n any discussion of professional church ministers-lay or ordained-one will hear two types of stories. The first type are those that reflect amazing feats of spiritual leadership in which pastoral ministers help people encounter the love and mercy of God. It is not drama one hears but the deep, consistent patterns of care, formation, patient listening, and llumination of the ordinary. They are stories of grace in action. The other set of stories are darker because they recount the stresses and strains under which ministers labor. Some of those challenges are normal dynamics in ituations where so much of what nappens is personal, interpersonal, and lependent on emotional investment. At the same time, certain manifestaions of stress cannot be explained away s "part of the job package" as though

they excuse human and organizational ineptness, dysfunction or outright neglect.

This article seeks to suggest reasons for the darker form of stress, the sort of stress that encumbers the work of ministry and in fact damages the well-being of ministers themselves. My focus will be on lay ecclesial ministers, that large body of professionals without whom most parishes in the United States would go wanting for wise, creative leadership. This focus should not be construed as meaning that clergy experience little stress or, worse, are the unnamed source of stress for their lay colleagues. In some instances, the latter is true as will be noted below. However, it is too easy to point to clergy as the culprits, as if one could fix them and all would be well.

My perspective is shaped by nearly twenty-five years in theological education during which I have studied professional ministers formally. In the past eleven years in my current position, I have been privileged to convene clergy and lay ministers for a variety of conversations as part of my school's commitment to their renewal. These women and men have been important teachers for me, tempering my observations and expanding my understanding of what they are asked to do as part of the Church's commitment to building and sustaining vibrant communities of faith. In addition, my involvement with several initiatives of the Lilly Endowment has given me a wider, interdenominational perspective from which to consider what I see and hear in my work in Collegeville.

For this article I am viewing stress in the traditional sense as hardship, adversity or affliction (Oxford English Dictionary) resulting from conditions of employment in which the lay ecclesial minister feels a lack of respect and recognition, lacks control of what happens when pastoral leadership changes and experiences sustained situations in which staff relationships are undeveloped and at times counterproductive. In this operational definition, programs proliferate, mission seldom directs decisions, doing more with less is normative and predictability is vague. While lay ministers are busy and often buy into the American fascination with hyper-connectedness and multi-tasking, it is not simply overwork that is exhausting ministers. Rather, it is busyness that is unrelenting, often competitive, and not sustained by the quality of staff relationships or ongoing formation.

I am aware that this is a sharp-edged definition of the situation and that there are examples of parish staffs in which none of this is true or true to the degree I have stated. Nonetheless, the conditions outlined exist and will not improve without significant investment of time and energy and reconceptualization of what we mean by parish, what we expect of clergy, and what we understand the role of lay ecclesial ministers to be. These are three very large conversations, and this article only intends to sketch out variables that play into them.

ROLE AMBIGUITY AND THE LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTER

At the system level of the Church, lay ministers often comment that they "don't count." It would be interesting to survey the dioceses in the United States, for instance, to see how many of them keep a current roster of professional lay ministers. While some dioceses have moved forward on the certification process recommended for lay ecclesial ministers, most have not. It is not a priority when faced with the dilemma of figuring out how to staff parishes with fewer priests. It is also not a theological consideration. While the USCCB's Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord (2005) has been a major effort in that regard and Saint John's University has played a significant role in maintaining the momentum on implementation of that resource, the average Catholic has yet to recognize the indispensible contributions lay ecclesial ministers make to proclaiming the Gospel and sustaining parish life much less appreciating that lay ecclesial ministers experience a vocational call to what is their life's work.

Lay ministers exercise professional expertise, but conversations with them reveal quickly that their wellspring is not in technique or even their advanced training. Rather, it comes from recognition that teaching the faith, planning liturgies, comforting the sick and dying, working with youth, providing administrative leadership for parish operations, and other functions that sustain communities of faith *is what God wants of them*. When their sense of call is denied, patronized, or minimized, lay

ministers experience ambiguity. On the one hand, their preparation emphasizes that theological and pastoral knowledge grounds them within a vocational call. On the other hand, structurally they are considered employees with limited authority, no tenure and subject to the preferences of pastors, pastoral councils and parishioners. Role ambiguity produces stress as a by-product that often becomes evident in decreased job satisfaction, defensiveness, discouragement, and disillusionment. The perception that "the Church doesn't take us seriously" can also lead to a neo-clericalism where the lay minister guards her small fiefdom with a fierceness outsiders cannot understand. It is the one place, however, where she is certain who she is and what she has authorization to do.

THE CULTURE OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

One pastor described his parish as a "spiritual supermarket" where people come looking for whatever it is they need at the time for peace of mind, solace, or meaning. He was not being cynical but recognized that the nostalgic memory of the parish as a close-knit congregation that was both spiritual home and center of social life is generally gone for most parishioners. As a result, parishes strive to create opportunities that respond to the multiple needs and interests of members. This comes out of a sense of service so that people have a variety of access points at different stages of their spiritual journeys. It is a highly admirable value. Its primary danger point is the temptation to believe



that having access leads to conversion. At some point "customer satisfaction" must yield to an altar call. Without it, lay ministers scramble to find the next best program that will attract participation and commitment from parishioners. If I were to fault the level of busyness among ministers, it is the false belief that there is a next best program.

Good programs emerge from careful listening, lots of conversation, and from systematic evaluation. Ministers do listen to parishioners but seem too quick to respond programmatically. When people say they want more Bible study, what are they asking? Why do they want it? Who will lead it? How will it be sustained over time? By whom? Conversation that stays open to new possibilities is difficult when there is pressure to create "opportunities." Moreover, few parish staffs invest the time and effort to use evaluation as an effective tool for discerning what is working, what has served its purposes, and what lies behind people's expressions of liking or disliking this or that aspect of parish life. The culture that has grown up around parishes is ripe for producing stress, primarily because the level of opportunities expands even as staffs are downsized and resources decline. Doing more and more with less and with the absence of notable impact is a recipe for stress.

THE PARISH AS ORGANIZATION

By this point it should be clear that from my perspective the parish as we define it structurally has long since served its purpose. Pastors and lay ecclesial ministers together with parishioners need to suspend for a time their assumptions about what a parish looks like structurally so that they can think freshly about how to organize themselves for the world as it is. This is not encouraging an act of rebellion as much as a thoughtful reappraisal of now people form themselves into voluntary communities of shared interest and values.

As important as that process is, it depends to a large degree on how effectively clergy and lay ministers can

come to terms with their dynamics of working together. The dark stories from ministers tell of arbitrary decisions made with no consultation; staff meetings that circle around unrelated topics and practice interpersonal sabotage as though it were an art form; lines of accountability that sometimes work and sometimes don't; communication patterns based on presuming the worst of the other; conflicts that fester until they are open, weeping wounds; and assumptions that everyone believes are operative but no one states aloud much less challenges their accuracy. While few staffs embody all of these characteristics or as starkly as I have described them, there is an amazing lack of appreciation for investing in staff development and ongoing formation. When people do not sort through issues of power and authority, they create situations ripe for passive-aggressive behavior, authoritarian actions, creation of territorial boundaries, and mutual suspicion. Good staff relationships do not happen by accident. When they do, they are an anomaly. Healthy staffs, like healthy people, work at it. They spend the time needed listening to one another, increasing effective communication including the management of conflict, learning about what each other thinks, and taking seriously what it is to be a group of people advancing a common mission and vision. They also pray together and do theological reflection. This is hard work and it is emotional work. It is also indispensible. A pastor who neglects cultivating the quality of staff life is failing as a leader. Lay ministers on staff who wait for the pastor to make everything work are setting themselves up for disappointment.

Ministers will often report that staff relationships are a major source of stress for them, yet the common response seems to be for people to get busier. One reason for reluctance to invest in staff development is the fear that this can compromise boundaries and even affect productivity. My argument is not that clergy and lay ministers should be friends. In fact, that is not an ideal if it means that people's emotional lives totally depend on their relationships

Pastors and lay ecclesial ministers together with parishioners need to suspend for a time their assumptions about what a parish looks like structurally so that they can think freshly about how to organize themselves for the world as it is.

with staff colleagues. At the same time, the work of ministry is deeply personal and connected to the very core of being human. The quality of staff relationships should reflect how those values temper impatience, sharpen one's listening, encourage forgiveness and reconciliation, and expand one's humanity. No amount of programming offsets attention to creating and sustaining a staff in which relationships among all members manifest what they preach.

THE MINISTER AS AGENT OF CHANGE

It is important to emphasize the point raised above that a healthy staff is not just the sole responsibility of the pastor. To do so encourages passivity among lay ecclesial ministers when in fact they are agents in their own right. A difficulty admittedly arises when the pastor is not interested in or is indifferent to staff development. This can happen because it threatens his sense of control, challenges his skillfulness, or reflects a style preference that finds the emotional dynamics of staff development uncomfortable. Even in those situations, the lay minister has a responsibility to act by raising questions related to staff development, modeling the sorts of behaviors she or he believes characterize healthy relationships, challenging unspoken assumptions and telling the truth when the larger good of the parish and of the staff demands it. This takes courage and an inner strength that I do not underestimate. It does baffle me, however, when ministers tell stories of terrible dysfunction in a parish and/or among staff in which they do nothing except suffer the stress and pain. When that happens, they often become ill-if not in body, surely in spirit. They grow suspicious, cynical and bitter. Their relationships outside the ministry suffer, and their capacity for growth is compromised.

This is not to burden the individual minister with singlehandedly fixing a broken system. Rather, it is to emphasize that the lay minister has to do the inner work if she or he is to be an agent of change where change is

possible and to act for his or her well-being as well as that of the parish. Without inner courage and clarity, ministers stay too long in situations that will not yield to reasonable and sustained efforts to effect positive change. I realize it sounds glib to suggest that there are times when it is the prudent choice to resign and seek other employment. At the same time, the minister who allows herself or himself to waste away in a setting that simply refuses to reform risks embracing victimhood and squandering the gifts God has given with the call. A healthy minister pays attention to what is happening within. Such persons continue to grow theologically, pastorally, personally and spiritually. They process disappointments, offenses and oppression so that they do not live out again and again the effects of unresolved wounds they have experienced. Such inner work is essential for the minister's capacity to respond to the complex challenges of ministerial leadership in equally complex organizations.

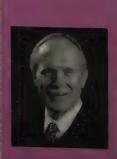
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While I have laid out my perspective in hierarchical form beginning with the system and moving downward to the individual minister, my recommendations work in the opposite direction. In part, that reflects my conclusion that the Church as institution is not going to quickly come to a new understanding of the vocation to lay ecclesial ministry that will alter structures and mandate new patterns of relationships. The process is underway and has excellent leadership from both bishops and theologians. Even if their work could be done faster than Roman Catholic time usually passes, the prevalence of stress requires significant action now.

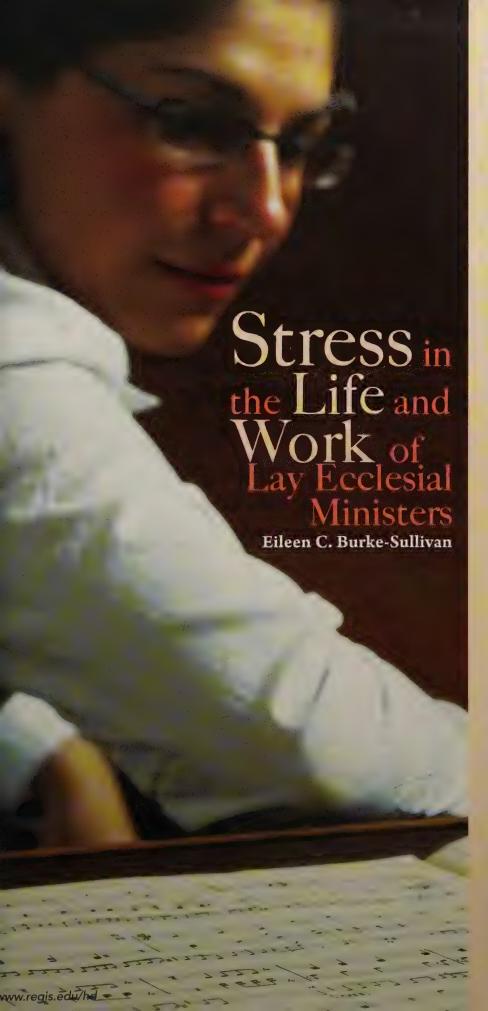
What can be done involves ministers themselves examining their experience and interpreting what it means for the practice of ministry. This means figuring out how lay ministers and clergy converse with one another about pastoral life and mission without living in the shadow of who has the most power. If that is the endgame, conversation is dead before it begins. Being able

to connect with one another at a deep theological and emotional level in which the passion for preaching the Good News is a common reference point puts issues of structure, process and authority in their proper perspective. Witnessing to how the claimed values of Christian discipleship reform how people relate to one another and organize themselves for a shared ministry is not dependent on canon law. Convening colleagues for reflecting on the work of ministry and the theological insights it generates is work that not only can reframe how ministers will create the future but how they will discover forms of communal life best able to intensify the encounter people have with the mercy and love of God.

Leadership for the work I am envisioning that will ultimately get at the taproot of stress can come from anywhere. Waiting for the bishops or priests passes the buck. The role of professionals is in part to attend to the wisdom that underlies the profession and informs its practices. Lay ecclesial ministers are equipped for this challenge and need to respond. This work also demands a capacity for stillness, for crafting space in which there is sufficient time and leisure to think and imagine. Ministers, both clergy and lay, have become so accustomed to busyness that they will be more challenged to make space than to converse. But there is no alternative to creating such space. Professors will write books; bishops will issue pastoral letters and directives; and people like me will write commentaries-all of us hoping to contribute to a vibrant renewal in ministry. But it is only the ministers themselves, ultimately, who will make renewal happen and with it create a way of life that manifests what they most deeply believe.



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hy an article on the stress of lay ecclesial ministry? Are not the various kinds of stress and tension that mark the roles of parish music director, director of religious education, or parish school principal essentially the same as those that harry the lives of other professionals? The short answer to this question is yes, the stresses and tensions associated with lay ministry in the Catholic Church of the United States do not appear, superficially at least, to be much different from the day-to-day stresses of any professional in a similar field of endeavor. The list can be compiled quickly whenever colleagues get together. It includes overwork, inadequate pay, conflict with colleagues, budget shortfalls, power inequities and balancing personal time with work. The list will be similar whether you are talking with teachers, lawyers, psychologists or Catholic lay ministers.

What makes the stresses of the latter group more complex is the tension caused by conflicting values that lie hidden within the Christian value system. Those tensions are exacerbated by the contradictory values of Christian and secular cultures that blend uneasily in the complex world of the United States. Central to any culture are the relative values placed upon work and play, the meaning of success and accomplishment, the expectations placed upon leadership, the inherent value of persons, the values placed upon talent, training, explicit or implicit gender relations and any number of other factors. Central to the Christian community is a belief in the active presence of God-but a God that can't be defined by any single image.

Research indicates that within the U.S. culture a high value is placed on work excess. Furthermore, fragmented and fragmenting relationships are often the norm. Human worth is measured in financial terms and scientific reason trumps faith on most educated people's



value meters. Such characteristics of the driving secularization of the U.S., however, are countered by large pockets of strongly increasing religiosity-often, but not always, driven by ethnic traditions. Unfortunately, religiosity is often manifested within balkanized ideologies. Internecine Catholic culture wars can be found throughout the church in the U.S. For one who seeks to provide ministerial service in this cultural stew of conflicting values, what might seem like the ordinary stresses of professional or work life emerge from the resulting layers of complexity that may not be associated with similar kinds of work in a nonreligious setting.

In his book The Future Church. John Allen briefly discusses the radical growth in the numbers of professional lay ministers as a significant aspect of the overall expanding role of the laity, his fifth of ten trends driving the Catholic Church of the twenty-first century. Allen asserts that this trend is not limited to the United States: "The total 'workforce for the Church's apostolate,' to use the official Vatican term for clergy and laity involved in Church ministries. totaled 1.6 million when John Paul II was elected in 1978. When he died in 2005 it was 4.3 million, with roughly 90 percent of that figure being laity" (p. 195). These data, of course, would include vowed religious brothers and sisters in the category of laity. Other data indicate, however, that the numbers of vowed religious have dropped across the church, so that buried in the Vatican numbers is the fact that a nearly 300 percent increase in the "workforce" of the church is constituted by the baptized who are not religiously vowed as well.

In this rapidly expanding population of lay ministers, the causes of stress will be different between men and women, different again along the faultlines of ethnic and national differences, and with further differentiation according to the actual ministry undertaken. Lay ecclesial ministry generally evokes images of parish or diocesan professional staff, but the list continues to expand as various areas of care emerge: hospital and prison chaplains, youth ministers, retreat and spiritual directors, educators in Catholic elementary and high schools, theologians in colleges and universities, lay missionaries, editors and publishers, staffs of food-banks, alcoholic treatment centers, nursing homes, etc. Each ministry has its own kind or kinds of stress both internal to the nature of the ministry and from the larger world. Since a short essay cannot serve as an encyclopedia of ministerial sources of stress, I intend to limit the discussion of the sources to parish and diocesan professional staff members who are paid on a full- or part-time basis. In fact the primary sources of stress that I want to briefly examine here can be expressed in the phrase "paid professional." This term includes the two broad arenas of stress: money (or lack of it) and formation (who provides and pays for it, what status or authority it provides, and what elements it incorporates). Stress also comes from a community's high expectations, disparate power within structures, and the difficulty of balancing family life with ministry. These sources of stress are interrelated and they are by no means the only stresses that lay ministers deal with, but they are most frequently cited and often underlie other stresses and tensions.

FINANCES, BUDGETS AND SALARIES

In the early summer of 2008 the *National Catholic Reporter* posted on its website a letter to the editor that was written in response to a news report of a national lay ministry "summit." The frustration of the letter writer is easy to discern:

....[T]ry to put three children through college, buy a house, and save for retirement on \$27,500 a year. The biggest joke is that after 15 years of service to my church at both the parish and diocesan levels, the increase in my salary did not even come close to covering inflation. During that same period, the deductible on my health insurance at least tripled. (7/11/08, p. 24).

The writer does not mention whether he received any retirement benefits. This could well determine whether he will be even more impoverished in his senior years because even his social security payments will be minimal, based on such a low salary.



In 2008 Marcia Potts, a pastoral associate at a large parish in the Omaha archdiocese, published a study "Pros and Cons of Working as a Lay Ecclesial Minister," in *Family Perspectives Journal* (Vol. 25 No.1, pp. 4-5) of the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers. She found that 95 percent of the ministers responded that their salaries were insufficient as a primary source of income for their families, and 75 percent of the respondents indicated that their family made significant financial sacrifices so that the minister could continue to serve the church.

Most Catholics do not enter into ay ecclesial ministry for financial gain. Nearly always there is a clear and deliberate sacrifice of material wealth that the person understands and accepts for the sake of the ministry. Since spiritual poverty is extolled as a beatitude in the Gospels, an attitude of simplicity is realy necessary for ministry. But there is a distinction between spiritual poverty and material poverty, and a distinction petween living simply and living in cripoling poverty. The latter is understood n Catholic theology to be an evil that in ustice must be eradicated where possiole. This tension of having enough to naterially support one's dependents while doing without a lot of extras for he sake of the gospel and the communiy—is best maintained by the minister ather than having it imposed from outside. The use of a minister's gifts without dequate compensation is oppressive.

Chronically low salaries for miniserial work have often kept lay men out of the field. Although I do not know of

significant studies on the specific causes of male/female imbalance in lay ministry, there is some anecdotal evidence to indicate that when ministerial salaries reach even partial parity with those of similarly educated professionals, men are attracted to lay ministry in higher numbers.

Not surprisingly, women are often not paid at the same scale as men are in ministry with the same qualifications and job demands. This only further exacerbates the level of stress. I remember clearly my shock when I discovered that two men on a parish team where I served-both with equal or less education than me and other women on the staff, with fewer years of service and lighter work loads-received nearly 20 percent higher salaries. When the pastor was asked about the disparity by the finance committee, he said that he had to be concerned about the fact that men worked to support their families while women worked to make "pocket money." One could raise the biblical principle that the justice of God requires that every person have enough of what is required for full dignity. All of us were contributing to our family's basic needs, and the pastor's unexamined assumption was profoundly sexist. It violated the dignity of both the men and women on the pastoral team.

While such unjust and false assumptions may not be widespread, the simple fact is that lay persons who work for Catholic parishes or in diocesan offices are still not adequately compensated. Regular salaries and benefits a re not comparable to nonprofit

organizations or the public sector, much less the private business sector.

A pastor or bishop does not want to underpay his professional lay staff, but there is a value embedded in Catholicism that spiritual or religious service should be freely given, and supported by donation rather than a set salary. When I was in grade school, our parish school had no tuition. Families were expected to contribute to the parish as well as they could and the parish provided food, housing and a stipend of \$25 per month for each of the twenty-plus sisters who taught in the school. Priests received food, housing, a car, gasoline, a stipend of approximately \$100 per month and any stipends for sacramental services at which they presided. Given inflation, to find these amounts in today's dollars, multiply it by eight times. This works out to salaries of about \$200 per month for each sister and \$800 per month for each priest.

Catholics expected to have the formation needs of children met and their own pastoral and spiritual needs addressed for very small financial contributions. One effect of this was that Catholic education, faith formation, spiritual care and leadership were made available for little or no money and were, therefore, not perceived to be worth a lot of money. A second effect was the communication of a value that those religious or clergy who succeeded on such small sums were holier than others and had a "first-class ticket" to heaven, rather than the "third-class ticket" of the laity.

There is a link within the Christian spiritual tradition between manifest holiness and voluntary simplicity or even poverty, but it is a complex link that becomes problematic when there is an assumption that material poverty "causes" holiness. Rather, material poverty causes great stress in a world where the professional middle class can afford to send their children to good schools, pay for life and health insurance, provide housing, clothing, food and resources for cleanliness. In many suburban parishes the lay ministers have trouble finding housing in the neighborhood because it is too expensive for the salary ministry provides. their Furthermore, as we have seen with the women's religious communities, longterm underpayment has come back to haunt the U.S. church with houses of elderly religious whose communities can barely afford to support them or provide adequate health care.

FORMATION

Related to the financial stresses associated with professional lay ministry are the various stresses tied to the professional and spiritual formation of ministers. As the Catholic population became better educated, ministers had to be at least as well educated, if not more so, to be able to lead the community.

As ministerial leadership shifted toward lay participation, it became evident first to lay ministers themselves that they needed theological formation comparable to that of the clergy and spiritual formation equivalent to that of vowed religious. Shortly after the council, seminaries and divinity schools opened their doors to lay students, with the cost of such formation falling largely on the shoulders of the students themselves. While dioceses had funds set aside for priesthood candidates, they had little for deaconate formation and none for lay formation. As more and more ordinary ministry fell to lay ministers no one asked the folks in the pews to consider establishing scholarships for lay students similar to the diocesan seminary burses.

Divinity schools, seminaries and Catholic universities have offered some financial assistance, but it is usually the candidate for ministry who is required to find the funds to pay for the education that will make his or her service to the church competent. Only in the last fifteen years have there been formal programs addressed to lay ministry. Those who became paid professional ministers acquired their skills, training and spiritual formation wherever they could. Field education often happened after one was hired for a position, with virtually no formal mentoring. Such helter-skelter formation left gaps that ministers themselves recognized as uncomfortable and unsatisfactory. Some who have struggled to be qualified have encountered suspicion from ordained colleagues who may not agree with a perceived theological direction of the school attended by the minister. Lay ministers with master's degrees have also experienced tension with their deacon colleagues because the diocesan deacon formation programs often do not educate to a masters level. Finally, the program of lay formation was often patterned on that of religious life, with little thought given to the specific needs of lay ministry. Nevertheless, reflection on the practical dimensions of lay spirituality has developed with the lay ecclesial ministry explosion, supported by the assertion in Lumen Gentium that all the members of the church are called to holiness. However, forming the lay minister in the deep spiritual life that the bishops envision is still in the early stages.

Working with lay candidates in formation through a master's program, I am struck by the organization and effort it takes mature men and women to incorporate advanced theological, moral and spiritual formation into their lives. They are already facing the multiple demands of immediate and extended families, household management, full-time work and the various challenges of civic participation. Even after a degree is achieved there is tremendous pressure to engage in continuing education programs and to read, study and pray so that personal and professional

growth keeps pace with the demands of competent ministry in a fast changing world.

TIME, EXPECTATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Parish lay ministers often face a stress-inducing "Catch-22" situation. There is more work than can reasonably be done, yet if some of it is neglected, then other work that depends upon it cannot be accomplished either. This became clear to me early in my work with parish music programs. If we did not do something about the pathetic state of proclaiming the scriptures no amount of musical triage would allow the parish to engage in "full, active and conscious participation" of the renewed rites. So soon enough I was training lectors, Eucharistic ministers, greeters, acolytes, and developing a working liturgical committee that looked for ways to invite the whole congregation to be more knowledgeable. But at the same time I was still directing choirs, preparing the rites, and trying to keep up with my own musical, liturgical, and spiritual formation. Ministry rapidly expands into a 24/7 reality unless boundaries are established by the minister, parish council, pastor or by a structural plan that involves the input of all these voices.

In a situation where a person comes on the staff to replace someone who has served for a number of years, the parameters of the job may have been set by custom, or even by the particular interests of the former minister. The stress is exacerbated when a religious sister, priest or deacon accomplished these tasks in the past. "Sister always did it this way," or "Deacon Joe always had his door open and cell phone on," can translate to uncomfortable judgments about the generosity or faithfulness of the new lay minister who can't afford to be in the office at 9:00 pm because of family responsibilities.

Among the strategies that enable a minister to address this stress are the following: finding a balance among the demands of reasonable and generous service, finding practical support sys-

ems for accomplishing necessary and ime-consuming tasks that leach minstry of its joy, setting realistic goals, stablishing timelines that work and building in time for potential crises.

Some years ago there was a woman erving as a pastoral associate and liturist in a large parish in our deanery. She vas responsible for a wide range of pasoral decisions and tasks. Early in the fall one year her husband became seriously ll, had to give up his job and then nearly lied. Her older and very dear brother lied after a short and costly illness near Christmas, and then her pastor and ong-time mentor had a heart attack and lied in the middle of the Easter Season. No one could possibly build into a plan enough time and personal care to ddress such overwhelming events, but he had formed several volunteer assocites to take over some of the most chalenging tasks for a short term. She was ble to rally their help and support in nolding programs and patterns together o that she could take some time for selfcare and grieving. This strategy enabled ner to remain on the staff, serve mininally but effectively, provide mentored nternships and showcase a model of eadership for the whole parish.

For many ministers stress emerges rom not calculating the urgency of selfare and therefore not building in the patterns of personal nourishment that palance self-care with fidelity to those ve serve. In his article "Proposing Cardinal Virtues," moral theologian ames Keenan, S.J., of Boston College as written frequently about the virtue of Christian self-care. Keenan asserts hat virtuous self-care is the way of folowing the biblical mandate to love othrs as ourselves. If we do not love ourelves, and appropriately care for ourelves, our care for others suffers in a ariety of ways.

The Christian tradition, however, is illed with models of other-centeredness hat seem to deny the right balance of elf-care. Secular society is likewise built in a kind of work obsession, so it is easy of find time for every demand and proj-

ect except to provide for one's own needs. Complicating this situation for many women ministers who are also mothers or daughters of elderly parents is the reality of two care-giving responsibilities. The stress of this competition for time is often overwhelming, and may be less understood by celibate colleagues, or persons in different age groups.

CONCLUSION

Stress inherent to ministry arises from the tension of conflicting cultural values, but it also comes from providing service to communities that have been largely served by celibate men and women for centuries. This is changing and the changes are bringing new ways of understanding the proclamation of the gospel. But change is a source of stress. Transformation comes in the crucible of incompatible perceptions, needs and expectations. The minister who has a number of conscious or unconscious hopes about the church at large, and about ministry and its effectiveness, will find great surprises that are both wonderful and térrible in the real world of ministry. A good mentor who is both realistic and deeply faithful is a pearl of great price; a spiritual director who understands lay ministry provides accountability; a group of colleagues willing to work at being a team helps address stress; a pastor or bishop who really appreciates lay co-workers will provide the essential leadership; and family and friends who understand the demands of lay ministry help him or her to cope and even thrive in the ministerial setting. Rarely does a lay minister have all these human supports in place at one time, but cultivating them, along with deepening our companionship with Jesus, will make lay ministry a way of life that is shot through with the glory of God's reign even while riddled with various forms of stress.

RECOMMENDED READING

Allen, Jr., J. L. The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church. New York: Doubleday, 2010.

For information on inflation and poverty, see http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl and http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty. For information on salary levels for various professions, including Catholic priests, visit http://www.salary-expert.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=Browse.C a t h o l i c - P r i e s t - s a l a r y - d a t a details&CityId=41&PositionId=245652.

Keenan, J. "Proposing Cardinal Virtues." *Theological Studies* 56 (December 1995): 709-729.



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PRAYER A Family's Best Stress Management Tactic

Lisa M. Hendey

he average parent precariously balances the roles of educator, chef, accountant, groundskeeper, advocate and spouse with his or her other professional responsibilities. Add in homework, extracurricular activities, financial pressures, and simply the fast pace of life in general and you have an equation for stress that could stump even the most seasoned of mental health professionals. And yet, when queried about how they manage stress in their fareily lives, many who recently responded to my recent informal survey on stress management tools replied with a common theme. Ask any busy Catholic parent about how he or she manages stress in their family life, and it's likely that their response will contain more than a few words on the importance of prayer-and overall spiritual well being in general-in turns

VOICES OF PARENTS

From the Ohio farmhouse where she busily raises two preschoolers, Sarah Reinhard (www.snoringscholar.com) relies upon her blossoming relationship with our Blessed Mother, a byproduct of her recent conversion to Catholicism. "I find myself using the Hail Mary like a lifeline, holding onto it and saying it when I can think of nothing else to say. And you know what? It clears my head and helps me see what's most important." Sarah knows that when Mom puts up a calm, clear front, the rest of her family is more readily able to follow her lead in facing whatever lies ahead.

Catholic author and magazine editor Danielle Bean (www.DanielleBean.com), who along with her husband Dan manages a career and the homeschooling of her eight children, has learned that having an active prayer life helps to

keep things in perspective when stressful situations arise. "If I remember to put God first and make prayer time a priority, all the rest tends to fall into place. The trick is remembering to do that. We get stressed when we think it's all on us, but we relieve our stress when we remember *God* is in charge—our job is just to keep our heads down and keep working."

Deacon Chuck Stevens (www.smalltalentmusic.com) reminds families to keep lines of communication open—both within the family and with God. "We handle stress by talking things out," shares Deacon Chuck. "This hinges on a couple of very important things: a willingness on the part of each family member to really listen to what the others are saying (which cannot be underestimated when you are especially dealing with stressed-out teens), and a willingness to set aside whatever other individual things we are doing and approach the stressor as a

amily (either in a shared activity, a lrive, talking about it in a 'family meetng')-but with the constant theme of God being present in the moment too!"

In the Young home, high school eacher Jeff (www.CatholicFoodie.com) nd his wife Char find that for their famly, "Praying out loud and from the heart lways provides a great relief from stress. The relief may not last long, which is vhy we have to call out to God again

nd again and again!"

Traditional Catholic rituals and acraments may also serve to aid families n dealing with the day-to-day difficulies that arise. Mother of four Rebecca Teti (www.faithandfamilylive.com) jokngly shares that when unexpected noments of craziness arise, her family goes verbal. "To be brutally honest, our amily handles stress by yelling! Fortunately, our brand of loud isn't generally aimed at each other-we don't perate, insult or deride-but in those noments when time is short and several asks remain before departure time, ve do tend to shout things like, "Ugh! am SO frustrated! Where oh where s my [hairbrush/lunchbox/permission lip/purse/key ring/wallet]?" Yet for lealing with more persistent stresses uch as a relative's long-term illness or he deployment of a beloved uncle in raq, the Teti family embraces the nealing sanctity of the sacrament of econciliation. "Frequent confession is tremendous remedy against not only tress, but the faults it can cause-such s rudeness and anger. I try to go every wo weeks, so as never to have more han 14 days of 'bother' on my mind, nd we take the kids once a month. It s hard to overstate the difference hat makes in self-control ven-temperedness for all of us."

Catholic author and speaker Donna-Marie Cooper www.donnacooperoboyle.com) finds erself and her family turning both to he Blessed Mother and to the Communion of Saints for their intercesion during life's crises, great and small. If the stress pertains to a bigger or onger lasting situation, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament is definitely in order. aith plays a huge part in handling very-day stresses and huge ones too. Vithout faith, where would we be, what ould we do? That's why we need to ray for an increase in that marvelous

virtue on a daily basis. Faith, hope and love-families need them all!"

REFLECTIONS FROM THOSE IN MINISTRY 2

Although they may not have wives or children of their own, Catholic priests know stress in their own lives and are called upon to minister to families facing a variety of difficulties. Father James Martin, S.J., the author of My Life with the Saints, shares what works for him in

For me, the best way to handle stress is to address the root causes. That sounds obvious, but frequently we fret about something (or at least I do) and the fretting takes us away from solving the problem. But what about those things you can't control, solve or fix? That's God comes Sometimes there's nothing you can do. In those times, it's helpful to turn it over to God. What does that mean, practically? It means making a conscious decision to ask God to help you with your problems, to trust that God will help you, and to try not to worry: about it, as far as possible. That's a real choice—handing it over to God-and it's not easy, but it can reduce your anxiety. Also, some stress comes from the false notion that we have to "fix" everything in our lives, when we are often powerless to "fix" anything. This is where humility comes in. You're not God and you can't fix everything. But you can hand things over to God and try to trust in God's care. As a friend of mine likes to say, "There is a Messiah, and it's not you!"

Father Leo Patalinhug, the Director of Pastoral Field Education at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, recalls his own childhood growing up in a large family. His family tended to hash out difficulties in long, sometimes heated, conversations around the family dinner table. Father Leo, whose "Grace Before Meals" (www.gracebeforemeals.com)

ministry encourages the strengthening of family relationships by creating and sharing meals together, offers a few practical suggestions for families dealing with stress. These include talking with God in prayer, but also finding a trusted friend or spiritual advisor who can help you to realize how God may be using the stress in a certain moment to strengthen you or bring about other spiritual growth in your life. Father Leo also reminds families to properly care for themselves physically by eating well and exercising regularly, as well as by engaging in a balanced lifestyle filled with hobbies, enjoyment and service to others.

Deacon Tom Fox (www.deacontomonline.com) recalls a stressful time during his years of preparation for the permanent diaconate when he felt a great deal of stress over the many assignments piled upon him, his concern over his academic performance and balancing his family and professional life. He recalls a friend's trusted wisdom at that stressful moment in his family's life:

> I used to stress a great deal about getting it all done, doing well with grades, etc. During the second year, I was talking with a good friend and classmate and he said to me: "You are praying before you start your work aren't you?" I had to gulp . . . the answer was so obvious: turn it all over to the Lord . . . His will be done. That is my answer for today: hand all struggles, problems and unexpected situations over to prayer. Let go and let God.

It's unlikely that the perfect solution for managing stress in family life looks exactly the same for every household. But it is clear that for Catholic families, a great deal of solace and wisdom can be found in turning to God for grace, strength, courage, perseverance and patience when life's hurdles seem highest.





TwentyStress Busters Therese Bourchard

n her insightful book, *The SuperStress Solution* (Random House, 2010) Roberta Lee, M.D., assesses the stress level in most homes today, and offers a word of caution about chronic stress:

We're deluding ourselves if we think that we can indefinitely endure the macro stresses that accompany impersonal encounters, less sleep, more work, less leisure, raising kids in this dangerous world, bad marriages, less exercise, junk and processed foods eaten on the run, hyper-caffeinated and sugar-saturated beverages, addictive devices that give us "screen sickness," traffic jams, flight delays, and so much more, and come away unscathed.

Stress isn't all bad, of course. In fact, like dark chocolate, small chunks here and there can be good for you, or at least give you a reason to get out of bed in the morning. But chronic and severe stress can damage your body and mind, blocking the fluid communication to and from most organs--especially in the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and in the limbic system, the brain's emotional center. Believe me, you want these two systems--much like

the House and Senate—running as smoothly as possible, with low levels of the delinquent stress hormones in your bloodstream.

In college I realized that my stress tolerance was below sea level. Unlike friends who could pack their semester full of 21 credit hours, I never went above 16 because I wanted to stay as stress-free as possible. However, as a mother who works full time, there is no way around the stress. I'm running into it in the closet, when I can't find two matching shoes; at parent-teacher conferences, where I am introduced to new issues; as I sit down to 200 unanswered emails; and at the vet's office, when I'm told the dogs are allergic to the cheap food we've been buying and now must be placed on a salmon diet.

So I turn to my pacifiers, my stress busters. Most of them involve the support of others: friends, who reassure me that our house isn't the only one that scares away babysitters; my marriage to the most patient man in the Western hemisphere; and, of course, my faith. I turn to my higher power and dump my load of responsibilities and disappointments and worry into his lap, for him to deal with.

dere, then, are twenty ways I try to de-stress.

. Simplify.

Cut your to-do list in half. How? Ask yourself this question fter every item: Will I die tomorrow if this doesn't get accomplished? I'm guessing you'll get a lot of no's. I'm sure tranklin Covey has a more efficient and elaborate system. But here's mine: Every morning I immediately jot down my o-do list. Once I experience the first heart palpitation, the list gets cut in half.

2. Prioritize.

Let's say you've got five huge work projects due next week, wo Cub Scout commitments you promised your son, your nom's overdue taxes on your desk, your wife's fortieth pirthday celebration to plan, and your sister's computer to ix. What do you do? You record all the tasks on a sheet of paper or on your computer and you give each one a number between 1 and 10, 10 being the most important (life hreatening) to one (stupid thing I signed up for). Start with the 10s. If you never get beyond the 8s, that's okay!

3. Use pencil, not pen.

fyou rely on your to-do list as much as I do, then you'll want o start using pencil instead of pen. Because one important tress buster is to try to stay as flexible as you can. Things change! And change is not our enemy, even though our prain categorizes it as such. You want to be able to erase a ask or reminder at any time, because who the heck knows what your day will be like.

1. Give away your cape.

f you haven't already guessed by now, you are not a uper hero and don't possess supernatural qualities and capabilities. I'm sorry, but you're going to have to join the ace . . . the human race. This means surrendering to imitations and conditions—like the number of hours in a lay (24), and the amount of time it takes to get from point A o point B. In your car. Not in your bat mobile.

6. Collaborate and cooperate.

There are lots of people out there with to-do lists that look very similar to yours. Why not let them do some of your asks so that you all don't have to do them? The moms round me have mastered this concept. They have set up a subspitting co-op: one mom volunteers to watch a neighbor's kid and by doing so earns babysitting points that she an redeem when a neighbor watches her kids. In the blogging world, I have begun to collaborate with some other nental-health writers so that we all don't have to scan the ame media outlets for depression-related stories. If I catch omething I send it to them, and vice-versa. It's an effective system.

6. Laugh.

Just as chronic and severe stress can damage organic systems in our body, humor can heal. When people laugh, the autonomic nervous system mellows out and the heart is allowed to relax. Laughter can also boost the immune system. It has been found to increase a person's ability to fight viruses and foreign cells and reduce the levels of three stress hormones: cortisol, epinephrine, and dopac. Plus it's just fun to laugh. And having fun is it's own stress buster.

7. Exercise.

Exercise relieves stress in several ways. First, cardiovascular workouts stimulate brain chemicals that foster growth of nerve cells. Second, exercise increases the activity of serotonin and/or norepinephrine. Third, a raised heart rate releases endorphins and a hormone known as ANP, which reduces pain, induces euphoria, and helps control the brain's response to stress and anxiety. You need not run a marathon or complete an ironman triathalon. A quick stroll in the morning or in the evening might be just enough to tell the stress hormones in your blood to scatter.

8. Stop juggling.

I realize some multitasking is inevitable in our rushed culture. But do we really have to cook dinner, talk to Mom, help with homework, and check e-mail simultaneously? If you were an excellent waiter or waitress in your past or present, then skip this one. However, if you have trouble chewing gum and walking at the same time like I do, you might try your best to concentrate on one activity at a time.

9. Build boundaries.

Speaking of activities, get some boundaries, A.S.A.P. Designate a place and time for certain things so that your brain doesn't have to wear so many hats at the same time. I thought this was impossible as a mom who works from home until I made myself abide by some rules: computer is off when I'm not working, and computer stays off in the evening and on weekends. My brain adjusted nicely and appreciated the notice of when and where each hat was required, and it actually started to relax a tad.

10. Think globally.

I don't say this to induce a guilt trip. No, no, no. Because guilt trips compound stress. What I mean here is a simple reminder that compared to other problems in our world today—abject poverty in Somalia or Cambodia—the things that we stress about are pretty minor. In other words, if I shift my perspective a little, I can see that there are far worse dilemmas than my poor royalty figures on a few books. Put another way: Don't sweat the small stuff, and most of it is small stuff.

11. Avoid stimulants and sugar.

Here's the catch-22: the more stressed you get, the more you crave coffee and doughnuts, pizza and Coke. But the more coffee, Coke, doughnuts, and pizza in your system, the more stressed you get. It's not your imagination. When you are stressed and have low levels of serotonin, your brain produces cravings for sugar and simple carbohydrates, which primes the beta-endorphin system to want more and more. The same with caffeine. It's a powerful drug that affects a number of neurochemicals in your brain, which means it produces withdrawal symptoms that can make you very, very irritable.

12. Don't compare and despair.

The last thing you should do when you're stressed is start looking around at other people's package (job, family support, balanced brain) and pine for some of that. I grow especially jealous of non-addict friends who can enjoy a glass of wine with dinner or those with a grandmother nearby who offers to take the kids for sleepovers. Often, I don't have all the information. The grandmother who takes the kids for the night might also have an opinion for every piece of furniture in her daughter's house and her own spare key so she can visit any time. So comparing my insides to someone else's outsides is a fruitless and dangerous game to play, especially when stressed.

13. Choose gratitude.

Can gratitude really combat the cortisol in your blood-stream? Yes. Dan Baker writes in *What Happy People Know* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2004): "Research now shows that it is physiologically impossible to be in a state of appreciation and a state of fear at the same time. Thus, appreciation is the antidote to fear."

14. Avoid negative people.

Of course, staying grateful is a lot easier if you are hanging with the right crowd. Because once the negativity is out there, it's up to you to tell your brain not to dwell on it. And, well, if you're like me, that cognitive exchange demands a lot of energy. Best to choose your friends carefully and avoid the toxic conversations as much as you can.

15. Clean and de-clutter.

Cleaning is a therapeutic activity that distracts your stressedout brain while delivering it something it desperately wants: order. As an architect, Eric is always telling me how my mess contributes to my anxiety—that the endless piles of paper on my desk can very definitely sabotage my mood. Every time I take his advice, and spend a day purging and organizing. I realize how right he is.

16. Sleep.

Everything breaks down when you don't sleep well. Any sleep disturbance will diminish mental performance. Stress affects sleep and vice-versa. Researchers at Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine compared patients with insomnia to those without sleep disruptions and found that the insomniacs with the most severe sleep disturbances secreted the highest amount of cortisol.

17. Categorize your problems.

If you lump your problems into categories, you will feel like you have fewer obstacles. I spend some time doing this in therapy every other week. Solving each and every hiccup is too overwhelming, but if they are organized into neat and tidy themes—such as "my boundaries issues"—then a few tweaks here or there can be applied to a variety of situations.

18. Lower your standards.

Whom do you think is crippled by more stress: the guy who aspires to flip burgers at McDonald's or the woman set on becoming the first woman president of the United States? My point is less about what you want to be when you grow up and more about firing the perfectionist in your head who won't accept anything less from you than a five-star performance. S/he could single-handedly cause a lot of stress.

19. Just say no.

If you haven't yet learned how to decline politely offers to head the next community fundraiser, it's time you stand in front of a mirror and practice. Repeat after me: "Mr. X, I am so flattered by the invitation to serve on your committee. Really I am. But I just simply can't do it at this time." I feel better just writing that.

20. Learn how to recharge.

Many folks know how to have fun and recharge their batteries. Mentally-ill addicts like myself have to learn this from scratch. After some experimentation I know that spending quiet time by the water (kayaking, running, biking in warmer months), reading spiritual literature, and watching a movie with a friend are all ways that will nurture me so that I can better tolerate stress. Know your rechargers and engage them routinely.



Therese Borchard writes the "Beyond Blue" blog on Beliefnet.com (www.beliefnet.com/beyondblue) and is the author of Beyond Blue: Surviving Depression & Anxiety and Making the Most of Bad Genes. You may find her at www.thereseborchard.com.

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